The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal

Southeastern Michigan's Conscious Living Magazine

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May Through August 2025 - Issue 89

FREE

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An Interview with Angela Jamison of Ashtanga Yoga Ann Arbor

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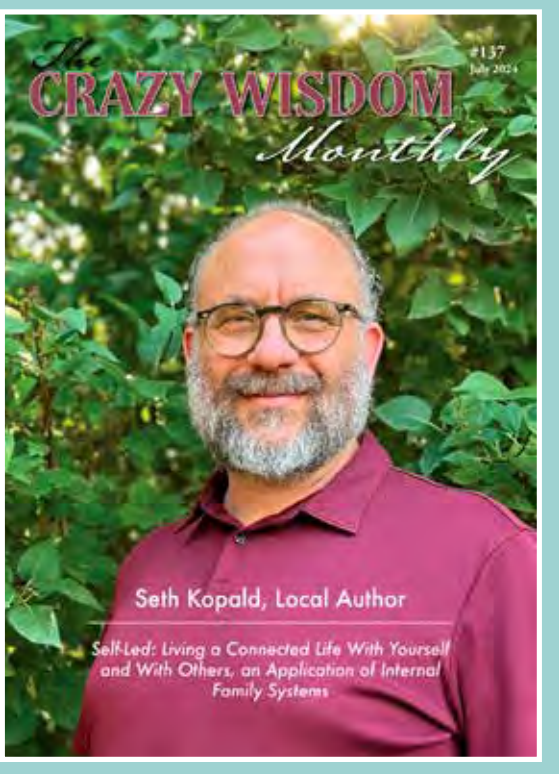

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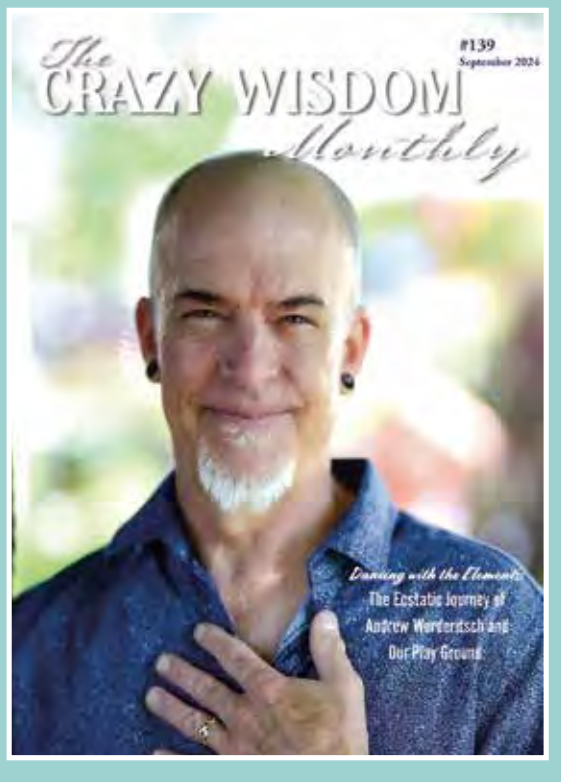

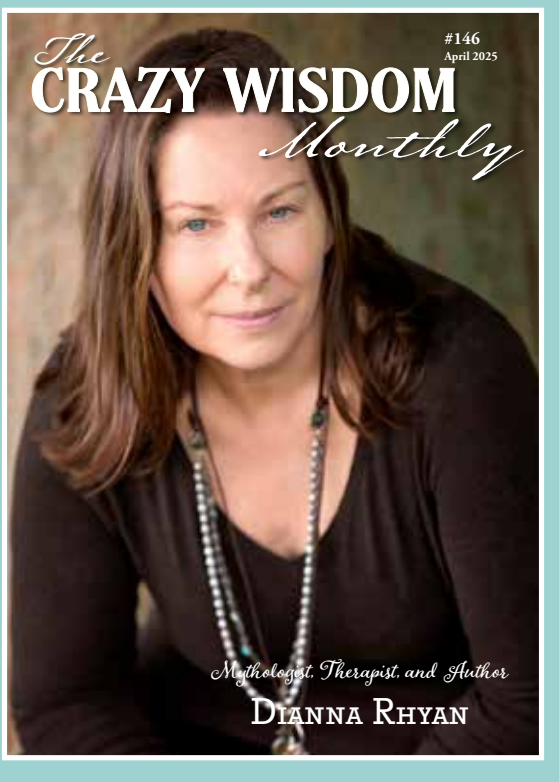

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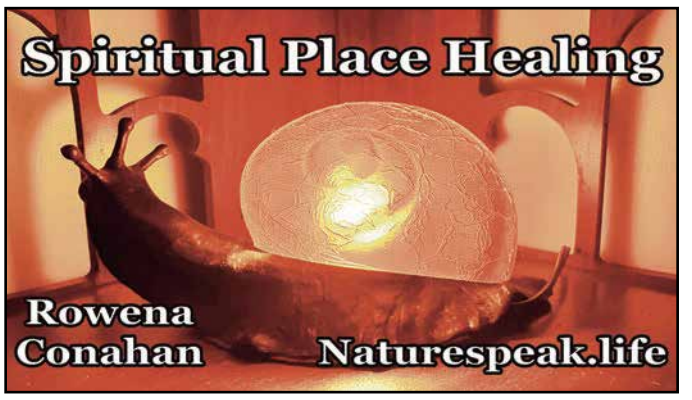

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In This Issue ~

Kindred Conversations ~
Dani Darling, Singer, Bandleader, and Performer
by Hilary Nichols
Page 10

Local Author Colby Halloran, and Her New Book, *The Northeast Corner*
by Rachel Pastiva
Page 18

Lauren Hoffman — Owner of Forged Barbell Holistic Strength Gym
Interview by Kaili Brooks
Page 50

Gardening Phenology — Planting by Nature's Cues
by Karen Quinn
Page 58

A Melding of Psychology and Spirituality — Chelsie Skowyra
by Samantha Beidoun
Page 66

A Traditional Yoga School Hiding in Plain Sight on Main Street — An Interview with Angela Jamison
by Ashley Waddell Tingstad
Page 68

Listening and Learning with Nature — Judy Liu Ramsey
by Michelle McLemore
Page 72

Kids in the Community ~
Abilities in Action: Resources and Support for Kids with Special Needs and Their Families
by Christine MacIntyre
Page 82

What if You Are the Plucky Comic Relief?
by Amy Lagler
Page 120

CWJ Features

Local Author Colby Halloran, and Her New Book, *The Northeast Corner*
by Rachel Pastiva ..... Page 18

Book Suey — Where Books, Art, and Community Collide
by Cashmere Morley ..... Page 20

Buddhism and the Beats — An American Cultural Saga
by Roger R. Jackson ..... Page 22

Getting to Know *A Complete Unknown* — Bob Dylan
by Richard Gull ..... Page 24

Lauren Hoffman — Owner of Forged Barbell Holistic Strength Gym
Interview by Kaili Brooks ..... Page 50

The Power of Music — Local Music Scene is a Source of Healing and Connection
by Lisa Viger-Gotte ..... Page 52

Pure Levels — Tree City's Futuristic Space Funk Odyssey
by Cashmere Morley ..... Page 54

A Melding of Psychology and Spirituality — Chelsie Skowyra
by Samantha Beidoun ..... Page 66

A Traditional Yoga School Hiding in Plain Sight on Main Street — An Interview with Angela Jamison
by Ashley Waddell Tingstad ..... Page 68

Listening and Learning with Nature — Judy Liu Ramsey
by Michelle McLemore ..... Page 72

Herbalist Alex Crofoot of Bloodroot — An Inspiring Blend
by Leif Laufeyjarsen ..... Page 78

CWJ Personal Essays

Dirty Windows
by Frank Vandervort ..... Page 30

Guilt, Judgment, and Forgiveness
by Sandor Slomovits ..... Page 32

Ch-ch-ch-Changes (with Apologies to David Bowie)
by Kirsten Mowrey ..... Page 33

Serpentine
by Irena Nagler ..... Page 34

Fifty Shades of Grey…(hair) and Gratitude
by Angela Verges ..... Page 65

What if You Are the Plucky Comic Relief?
by Amy Lagler ..... Page 120

CWJ Columns

Kindred Conversations ~
by Hilary Nichols
Dani Darling, Singer, Bandleader, and Performer ..... Page 10
Phillis Engelbert, Owner of Detroit Filling Station, North Star Lounge, and Lunch Room Bakery & Cafe ..... Page 12

Out of My Comfort Zone ~
Rory Walsh — My Cat Ate My Comfort Zone
by Rory Walsh ..... Page 14
Julie Tumbarello — Finding Light in the Darkness
by Julie Tumbarello ..... Page 16

Our Yoga Column ~
Namaste, Katie
by Katie Hoener ..... Page 37

What's New in the Community ~
by Lynda Gronlund ..... Page 39

Green Living ~
No Matter Where You Go, You Are in a Watershed!
by S.K. Rosina Newton ..... Page 88

Sustainable Health ~
Hypnosis For Peace of Mind
by Sherris Cottier Shank ..... Page 90

Spirit Seeds
by Triana Jones ..... Page 92

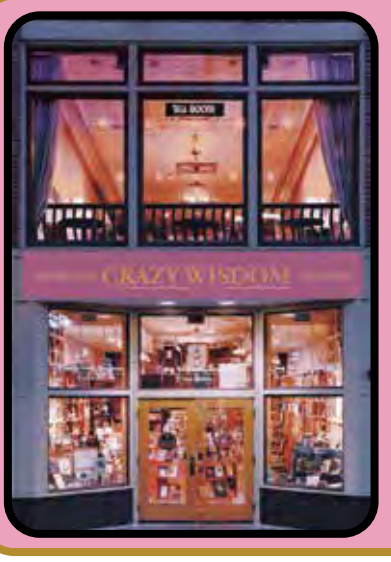
Astrologically Speaking ~
Fascinating Fun Facts About Astrology
by Catherine Carlson ..... Page 94

Weekend Getaways ~
A Visit to the Maryville Retreat Center
by Petula Brown ..... Page 118

On the Cover

Phillis Engelbert – Restaurant Entrepreneur and Social Justice Activist

Cover Photo by Hilary Nichols



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CWJ Conscious and Tasty Eating and Nutrition

Food Section ..... Starts on Page 57

Gardening Phenology — Planting by Nature's Cues
by Karen Quinn ..... Page 58

Nutrient Cycle at Strawbale Studio — An Evolving "Circle of Life"
by Deanne Bednar ..... Page 60

Growing Trends in Home Gardening
by Crysta Coburn ..... Page 62

Tea with Peggy — Minty Cool
by Peggy A. Alaniz ..... Page 63

Cooking with Lisa
by Lisa Viger-Gotte ..... Page 64

CWJ Kids Section

The Crazy Wisdom Kids Section ..... Starts on Page 80

Children's Book Picks ..... Page 80

Conscious Parenting ~
Elimination Communication — Potty Training the Ancestral Way
by Kaili Brooks ..... Page 81

Kids in the Community ~
Abilities in Action — Resources and Support for Kids with Special Needs and Their Families
by Christine MacIntyre ..... Page 82

CWJ Book Reviews

Book Review: *Wild, Willing and Wise* by Heatherash Amara
Book Review by Christine MacIntyre ..... Page 109

Book Review: *Custodians of Wonder* by Eliot Stein
Book Review by Christine MacIntyre ..... Page 114

CWJ The Calendar

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar Section
Calendar Edited by Kaili Brooks ..... Starts on Page 96
The Calendar ..... Page 96
Our Calendar Editor's Picks of Interesting Happenings in our Community ..... Page 97
Background Info on the Teachers ..... Page 113

The Franklin Method® — Pelvic Power
by Suzanne Willets Brooks ..... Page 100

What's on Your Horizon?
The Importance of Your Rising Sign in Aststrology
by Sam Oakwell ..... Page 104

CWJ Advertisers

Resources for Conscious Living ..... Starts on Page 2

Advertiser Directory ..... Page 8

CRAZYWISDOMJOURNAL.COM
This issue will be posted on our website as of May 1, 2025

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The deadline for Free Calendar submissions for the September through December 2025 Issue #90 is Tuesday, July 15, 2025

Contact kaili@crazywisdom.net

The deadline for reservations for Paid Advertising is Tuesday, July 29, 2025

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The Crazy Wisdom Journal provides an amazing platform for us to reach our community in a way that digital media and other technologies simply cannot. As a newly-opened Cannabis Microbusiness, we were very fortunate to have the platform like this to connect with health-conscious Ann Arborites who value local, natural products.

—Eric Parkhurst, Winewood Organics

Leslie Science & Nature Center is honored to continuing being a part of this critical local publication. Personally, I love reading CWJ, both the digital and print publications. There is something special about the people featured within both journals. ***I feel more connected and appreciative of the individuals and business who care for and celebrate the world around us.*** The consistency of intimate personal stories, alongside deeper philosophical conversations that I really enjoy! Thanks, Crazy Wisdom Journal, for continuing to seek out and feature all of the incredible people making our community special!

—Susan Westhoff, Executive Director Leslie Science and Nature Center and Ann Arbor Hands on Museum

Advertising, for over 20 years, in *The Crazy Wisdom Journal* has been a resource that keeps my business, Peaceful Dragon School, connected with a community of those looking for self-care and wellness methods that will augment their more traditional health support.

—Wasentha Young, Peaceful Dragon School

Over years and years of devoted service, ***Crazy Wisdom has grown into a magical, influential, and inspiring institution.*** It is one of the things that make Ann Arbor rate as a top place to live, nationwide, and an awesome place to put down roots. Thank you for all your determination and dedication over years and years, to increasing conscious living and quality of life, growing our community, and providing a platform to the highest of standards, for like minded people!

—Jody Tull, Be in Awe Yoga

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Clinical Hypnosis Institute 3
Crazy Wisdom Monthly ..... Front Inside Cover
Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle 105
Dan DeSena, Circle of Embodied Men 27
Deep Spring Center 75
dellAureo Wellness 109
Diamond Approach Michigan/ Lou Weir 3
Divine Sanctuary 5
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Dynamic Points Acupuncture / Henry Buchtel 2
Ellen Crane Counseling 17
Emanuele Acupuncture Center 2
Enlightened Soul Center ..... Back Inside Cover
Erik Fenz/Bodhi Body 2
Eve Wilson 5, 59
Fur and Feathered Friends 89
Frog Holler Farm 57
Ginger Chase Massages 2
Grove Emotional Health 87
Humane Society of Huron Valley / Tiny Lions 15
Inner Stellar Maps 19
Integrative Psychology/Eve Avrin 4
Intention's Manifest/Aaron Brooks 4
Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth 117
Jessica's Apothecary 106
Judy Ramsey/ Heart to Heart Animal Communication 75
Julie Woodward 5
K9 Translations 4
Karuna Buddhist Center 98
Kathrina Robb, Astrologer 2
Leslie Science & Nature Center and Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum 83
McLaren Wealth 9
Melisa Schuster, LMSW 2
Michelle Samuel 5
Michigan Collaborative for Mindfulness in Education 85
Monica Turenne / Four Paws Veterinary 31
Natural Healing Center/Denise Held 4
Naturopathic School of Ann Arbor 59
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Ruth Wilson 3
Shaman Tom 106
Sherris Cottier Shank 91
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Sophia Code Circles/Constance Hart 91
Stable Wisdom Coaching 87
Stephen Rassi / Chrysalis Facilitation and Counseling 4
Susan McGraw / Divine Inspiration at Work 3
Suzy Wienckowski / Reiki 5
This Breath / Jackie Miller 3
Transitions LLC / Linda Bender 4
Triple Crane Monastery 75
Upstairs at Crazy Wisdom 29
Yoga Focus 65
Yuliya's Naturals 3

In appreciation of all the talent and hard work that goes into *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*, we highlight some of our contributors in every issue.

Meet Some of Our Creative Team

Peggy River Singer is a Lightworker, all-beings communicator, channeler, and faery ally. She dwells in a funky little apartment on the enchanted shores of Ford Lake in Ypsilanti, where she teaches fae folk how to use and share Reiki to help bring more joy and healing into the world. Read Singer's interesting conversations with animals, nature, and spiritual beings in *The Crazy Wisdom Monthly*.

Rachel Pastiva is a former longtime manager of Crazy Wisdom Bookstore and contributor to *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*. She is the founder and president of the Ann Arbor Book Society, and director of the Friends of the Ann Arbor District Library. Her main passion in life is books, and she enjoys every chance she gets to connect people with them. Look for Pastiva's interview with local author Colby Halloran on page 18.

Mary Bortmas is a photographer with over 25 years of experience. She owns her own studio, Unforgettable Photos, in Manchester. In her spare time, Bortmas enjoys traveling (especially to visit her five children), sewing and crafting, baking, and gardening. Bortmas took the photos of Jim McDonald in issue #88 and the lead photo for the *What's New in Our Community* column on page 39.

Angela Verges is a freelance writer, author, and comedienne. Look for her book, *Menopause Ain't No Joke*. When Verges is not writing, she enjoys reading, spending time with her adult sons, and exercising (mind, body, and spirit). Verges believes that a chuckle a day keeps stress at bay and enjoys spreading joy, one laugh at a time. Read her humorous essay, *50 Shades of Grey* on page 65.

Crysta Coburn has been writing stories for most of her life. Her first short story was published at the age of sixteen, after winning runner-up in a local writing contest. She is a journalist, fiction writer, poet, playwright, editor, podcast co-host, and occasional lyricist. Don't miss Coburn's *Trends in Gardening* article on page 62.

Paul Stehle has been distributing our magazine all around the town since 2005, and for many places, he is the friendly face of the Crazy Wisdom Journal. He worked for MichCon/DTE for 30 years. He and his wife, Anne, live in Saline, and they have two grandchildren. Paul loves muscle cars and motorcycles, but only from afar. He works on 1:24 scale die cast model cars instead.

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Kindred Conversations

with Hilary Nichols

Singer, Bandleader, and Performer Dani Darling

Story and Photos By Hilary Nichols

Last summer, as she has every summer since 2018, Dani Darling performed at the Ann Arbor Summer Fest. This time she took to the main stage with her identical triplet sisters as guests to drop into an electrifying harmony like it was their first language—maybe because it was.

"We have been singing harmonies since before I can remember," shared Darling. "It was the first thing we could do. Even before we could talk." The Davis triplets were called up every Sunday at church. Identical triplets are one in a million, or three in a million, actually. Illuminated in the evening twilight in front of a glowing Rackham Hall, Darling commanded the stage with her whole heart. "To play the Summer Fest stage, it's my biggest show of the year. It means the most to me," she shared. "It is so good to see former teachers, classmates, and friends in the audience. I am truly a product of the Ann Arbor education system." Darling was a star student in orchestra, show-choirs, and more. "It really makes me so proud to be from Ann Arbor."

After college, "I wanted to establish my own thing," Darling said. She dabbled singing backup with reggae acts and jazz bands and then joined the Black Opera in 2017. "I learned so much about the music business." The Black Opera is a musical cooperative out of Detroit. "I gained the skills to do my own studio work, record myself, and craft my own projects." It was at that point that she started her solo work, ready to be her own artist. "That's when I became Dani Darling, just me."

It was at one of her solo shows that a bass player came up and offered to accompany her. That is how she met her best friend, Noor. "Then we were a band of two." At the next show a guitar player joined them, and the following show, a drummer offered to join. "It was like the yellow brick road," noted Darling. As a band leader of four, Darling loved writing and arranging the songs. "I am always trying to push the sound forward."

> "I take pride in crafting words and meaning that people will remember."
>
> –Dani Darling

Whether as a solo artist or with her groups, her writing process starts with making a lot of notes. Darling records melodies or tidbits into her voice memos to collect all the ideas as they arise. "My favorite way is to just play some of my favorite chords on my guitar until I hear a melodic line and then fit some poignant lyric that goes with it." She continued, "If it sounds like a poem, it will be a good song." Darling was a poet in high school and still writes in poetic form. "I take pride in crafting words and meaning that people will remember."

"My favorite song on my new project is called 'Same.'" Emblematic of her poetic process, she burst into song. "I love you and I want to say, where there is a will, there is a way. I say a prayer and it is your name. I will never ever be the same." "Same" was written after she moved an hour away from her best friend Noor, and they don't see each other as often. If this best friend love song seems uncommon, that is right in-line with Darling's work. Her sound is crafted from a great variety of influences. She describes her work as retro soul heavily inspired by the 1970s. "That music was so positive and sunny," she shared. "When it was just my daughter and I stuck at home, this was the music that we wanted to hear." She began posting covers on her social media accounts during the pandemic. "It was the music that would lift us up." Her audience agreed and grew. A fan base lined up quickly and inquired right away, "Are you coming back tomorrow?" She was happy to respond. "There was a need, so I rose to the occasion."

Whether posting covers or releasing originals, Darling's sound is sun flare sweet, bright, and alive with lush layers. Her pieces share a brave creativity, like a collage of sound, that is honest and engaging, as she speaks straight through to her audience. This is not 70's simple anymore. Her influences pull from world music, disco, and psychedelic certainly, but also theatrical effects, vintage elements, and experimental recording devices along with the cosmos woven throughout. In fact, she often looks to the sky for her inspiration. "I spend a lot of time talking about the cosmos." Many of her songs are otherworldly though rooted in Americana.

"I can take anything that is happening and zoom out to experience the loftiness of whatever situation I am in. I have a lot of themes that are cosmic." Darling is a certified astrologer and posts her Hellenistic Astrological readings on one of her many social media pages. Her online presence continues to grow. "I keep up on it because people were asking me for it." Her most popular song on Spotify has over 55,000 streams.

Singer, band leader, astrologer, and recently Darling has added professor to her online identities. As a passion project, she is teaching a theology course at HillmanTok University which is an online class through HBCU (Historically Black College & Universities) created by black educators to offer course work on TikTok. "I did an intro video and was blown away by how many people replied, 'I will come to your class.' It was like a runaway train." Darling's courses have gone viral garnering over 2000 followers and likes.

Tiktok provides a lot of traction to funnel her audience toward the other platforms as well. "It seems I can maintain a good spot when I am consistent. Though it can become a lot." Darling recognizes the dichotomy of being a content creator. In her most popular song to date 'S + M' she sings of the sadomasochism of social media: "Tell me how to get off. I just want to get off… I can't go outside, I am going live…I am aware all these likes are not cares… I feel like all these names are eyes. Why you like to watch me cry?" Darling preaches moderation of on-line life.

Though online is where she attracts her real-life bookings and opportunities as well. She was offered the Amplify fellowship sponsored by LEON Speakers and Grove Street studios. *Detroit Metro Times* put her on the cover and *Current Magazine* awarded her Best Jazz/Blues vocalist of 2024.

Her music career is her muse, but Dani Darling shares her passions through her role at the Neutral Zone in Ann Arbor. "Helping teens to find their purpose is definitely my calling. It is righteous work to motivate and orient these young people at a time like this." Darling is Program Coordinator and Curator of the Artist in Residence program at the Neutral Zone as well as an MYDA Educator (a nation-wide coalition of community-based organizations that use music as a youth-development tool). For two years Darling has coordinated programs like Beats, Songwriting, Jam Sessions, Poetry, and Women of Color. She also runs Neutral Zones podcast division.

It is a full life, even before being a mother. Darling's fifteen-year-old daughter, Eden, is hearing impaired. "I have been fortunate to be able to provide her with solutions here so close to the U of M facilities." Darling expressed about her daughter's cochlear implant surgeries: "To be able to take a child that is profoundly deaf and turn on her hearing. It feels so amazing that I was able to tap into the resources to get her that care. It is one of the things that I am most proud of," she shared. "My daughter is a fan of mine, but it was one of the most exciting days when I heard her singing along to Whitney Houston. That's my girl!" Darling beamed.

Darling found herself thankful for U of M's medical care when she had difficulty speaking while on stage. Aphasia, a disorder to one's ability to communicate, led to her diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis. With chemotherapy treatment twice a year she now has minimal symptoms other than having to manage her fatigue. "I do spend time addressing grief at having a chronic illness and how my life has changed because of it," she shared. Her current project is a lot more personal in response. "So, I talk about my health. I want to be a resource to help anyone navigate any limitations." Her upcoming project is a testament and a tribute to those with such concerns. If her earlier work is any indication, this release will be honest, innovative, beautiful, and so worthy of our attention.

Explore her cosmos by visiting Dani Darling through her social media outlets. Visit her online at: danidarling.org. On Instagram@danidarling and @danidarlingastro. You can listen to Darling on Spotify at open.spotify.com/artist/6OSNbDPLGoQgobWLtV566h?si=59p9iUH9RQKYRRxiyNqJgQ.

Kindred Conversations continued...

Phillis Engelbert, Owner of Detroit Filling Station, North Star Lounge, and Lunch Room Bakery & Cafe

"Operate from a position of generosity and humanity. Watch how it benefits your business." This simple statement is key to the working philosophy of Phillis Engelbert, owner of the Detroit Street Filling Station, North Star Lounge, and The Lunch Room Bakery & Cafe in Ann Arbor. The concepts of generosity and humanity might not be the most common buzz words in today's business culture, and her central tenet doesn't come without a cost—but that is not what concerns Engelbert. She recommends it for reasons that transcend the financials.

Having a loyal, trustworthy, and skillful staff does benefit the bottom line. However, her motivations are much more heart centered. She is truly driven to create a positive and supportive work environment because that is the right thing to do. "I have always strongly believed that staff need a living wage," Engelbert said. "And we look at this more holistically." A living is more than just income. "We want our team to feel valued and seen." Paid time off, sick leave, health coverage, a fitness stipend, and a generous starting salary are offered to her whole team voluntarily. "I don't have to. But I wouldn't do it any other way. Intention matters."

Along with her neighbor, Joel Panozzo, they expanded from backyards into hosting a series of pop-up meals in retail spaces. They were both social justice activists, both vegan, and both loved hosting.

Engelbert doesn't judge her business by a traditional measure of success. She is driven to create a basis for a shared success. "I have found that it is best practice to pay people a living wage and to give them paid sick time, as well as other benefits." She believes that being an employer carries a true responsibility in society. "How can I expect my employees to live a decent life if I am not doing what I can for my people?" she asked. "No, I am not the norm. I have never been the norm."

Today, Engelbert employs 44 team members in a stable schedule throughout the three locations—and all this started at a party.

When I ask her why, she tells me about the big backyard parties that she hosted the year she quit her corporate gig. "It all started with a sense of joy." She recounted how much she loved shopping locally, cooking, and gathering with neighbors. "We all chipped in together." Building community was the initial impetus for all of Engelbert's undertakings. It was 2010 when Engelbert's life and career took a drastic turn. "This was the first time I gave myself a chance to not work," she noted about this time of burnout. "I had been neck deep in social justice work for decades." For six months she let herself do whatever she felt like doing. Along with her neighbor, Joel Panozzo, they expanded from backyards into hosting a series of pop-up meals in retail spaces. They were both social justice activists, both vegan, and both loved hosting. "Everything felt possible," she mused. "The philosophy behind our business has always been that "work" should be the pursuit of what you love and should reflect your values, passions, and interests."

Their casual backyard repast took an upturn when they invited friends to their elegant, three course, plant-based dinner parties at the florist shop Pot and Box.

"Why vegan? Eating a vegan diet is essential to a philosophy of non-violence. The space was so gorgeous with all the living plants and flowers and with the vibrant food and friends. Plus, we always had a musical act." Their kids or young friends were offered the stage. [It was] just another way these gatherings grew the foundation of her burgeoning community. With this enthusiasm, the partners expanded their undertaking again for Mark's Carts. "Even that was a community process." They held a kickstarter party to build their food truck. Neighbors, friends, and their kids gathered for the build-out on their driveway over big pots of chili. "It was very joyful—always an infusion of life."

From 2011-2017 Mark Hodesh created and ran Mark's Carts, a small food truck yard in the parking lot behind their long-standing business, Downtown Home and Garden. Engelbert and her team crafted their food truck with flowers and herbs growing on top, a pair of speakers, and a ladder up the side to the tiny roof deck with patio furniture for two. "The Karts became a celebratory place, where people would gather and have fun." They had two successful seasons that strengthened their concept and community. "We had these contests (Bad Joke Thursday, Bigbird's Birthday, or Imaginary Friend Friday) to win a free cookie."

Operate from a position of generosity and humanity. Watch how it benefits your business.

As their menu expanded, they realized that they had outgrown the food truck. The Lunch Room operated in its Kerrytown location from 2013-2020. Engelbert described the offerings as 'healthy and decadent.' The eclectic fair shined with a wide variety of influences from Asian and Mexican to American and beyond. "We had something for everyone." With nearly everything locally sourced and made by scratch, some items like the Cuban black beans have been offered since day one. "I worked hard on the mac and "cheese," she said. So many iterations went into getting the cashew cream just right for the popular dish. "People are picky about their comfort foods." Behind the scenes, Engelbert would make her own big bowls for lunch. "The Power-up Bowl and the Lumberjack Salad— those were both just me." The kitchen staff appreciated and replicated her daily concoctions to perfection. Now [they are] two of the most well-loved items on the menu. When people ask if they can make the dishes at home, "By all means," she answers. The recipes are all published on their website. "They are welcome to if they want. But some of the dishes have at least five different recipes." It isn't simple but it works. The same is true both of the delicious recipes and the admirable organization. "It is kind of a complex puzzle. But it works." Englebert said her staff and practices overlap throughout their three locations. Most of her employees serve at more than one spot. Their loyalty is long-lasting, and it is earned.

Their next effort, the Detroit Filling Station, opened in 2017 across from Kerrytown on the original bricked Detroit Street. Its colorful front porch is surrounded by flowering plants. Sun umbrellas bedeck the tables along the sidewalk seating, and the tight top of this triangle lot is arranged to accommodate a musical act. "We book trios since that is about all the room there is," Ryan Shea, Engelbert's son and now the booking agent for both Kerrytown spots, reported. For five years the Detroit Filling Station had an active calendar of live music in its bar and front patio. In the warmer months the lunch crowd is packed in tightly. "When some would try to dance along to the live act, it was super fun, but mayhem for the waiters to try to get to the tables with their arms full of plates," said Shay. "When the North Star opened, the groups that played on the Detroit Street patio became our house bands on Thursday and Friday nights."

It was in 2022 that the vision for the North Star Lounge began to take shape when the neighboring business space became available during covid. The classic brick building, built in 1887, was originally built as a horse barn. It is just 600 square feet divided between two floors. So, embracing the idea wasn't without obstacles, but their commitment to sharing live music was strong. Against all odds, Engelbert felt the opportunity couldn't be denied. They took on the build-out of the space like a Tetris game. "It was the first space I ever personally designed. It fulfilled a dream to step into that role, to let those abilities and aesthetics show themselves." Though it was her initial effort, again Englebert shared the credit with her whole community. "Our employees painted the watery mural that leads to the stairs." For the painting project on the front fence, "We projected the image onto the wood and let friends paint it. And then people just walking by joined us," she marveled. "It was so much fun."

Now a chiminea fire-pit and patio seating make the outdoor area an important overflow for the tight quarters. Upstairs, the stage tucks in along the back wall, booths along the left and tables enough to seat a total of 35 guests. "It is tight, but it allows for plenty of interaction between performers and audience." And the space has found an ideal small space success. The calendar is full, with a number of popular weekly events, four nights each week. Wednesdays through Saturdays usually have two seatings per night. Happy hour is free from 5:30 to 6:30. Shea shared, "We refer to Wednesdays as 'Community Night,' dedicated to audience participation, such as comedy shows, karaoke nights, improv performances, fundraisers and our very popular monthly open mic night." LGBTQIA Thursdays, and often a double bill each weekend keeps the small room humming. Fridays are their most successful nights by far. The Pontiac Trail Blazers have an almost cult following. "People have a really good time. I have heard that people have created their whole friendship group from people they met here."

This spring, Olivia Van Goor returns with her fifth sell-out jazz vocalists cabaret series. "I noticed that there wasn't anything like this in the area and I knew many aspiring jazz vocalists that needed more opportunities to sing with a band and a live audience." Engelbert and Shea are fans of these sorts of shows. "The common thread is that they are all engaging to anyone and everyone in attendance," Shea shared about his booking philosophy.

"I want the village. The whole village. I feel that is missing for so many of us," Engelbert expressed. She makes the North Star space available for solidarity groups and other organizations to gather on the other days. This is so much more than just an eatery and venue. This is her social justice mission, with a menu. "What North Star does for me, it demonstrates what humans can be, and what we can do. We can create such meaningful relationships. We can create beauty," she shared. This uncommon protocol is more than a business decision. Engelbert acts from a deeper well. "Imagine if people were compassionate with each other and there was enough to go around, and we had these cultural explosions. Humans are capable of this." She obviously is here to serve more than lunch. Phillis Engelbert wears her heart on her sleeve and her convictions are expressed in real time, as she crafts and caters for a greater purpose. It is present in her conversations, in her choices, and on her website. Take the time to tour the pages to see their current charities, generous innovations, and other inspired offerings.

In a place of pride on the first floor of the North Star is a portrait of Harriet Tubman. "As I was meditating on a name [for this new space], I wanted to find something meaningful and expressive. I looked to my portrait of Harriet Tubman. She is a constant inspiration, and I realized that the 'North Star' was her guiding light. This is a safe space, so I wanted a name that evokes that message and honors her memory beautifully," said Engelbert.

The Detroit Filling Station Vegan Restaurant is located at 300 Detroit Street, Ann Arbor. The live music venue, North Star Lounge is next door at 301 North 5th Ave, Ann Arbor, and their Lunch Room Bakery and Cafe is in North Ann Arbor at 2200 Fuller Ct #8b. Visit each restaurant's website for merchandise, to order online, or to support their many charities and causes, and to purchase show tickets at thelunchrooma2.com/detroit-street-filling-station-1, or nstarlounge.com.

OUT Of My Comfort Zone

Rory Walsh *earned her doctorate in 2017 from the University of Oregon. She spent five years at the University of Michigan leading the Undergraduate Research Fellows Program for the Nam Center for Korean Studies, and mentored dozens of students working on original research projects. She hosts two podcasts,* "What Are Jobs? And How Do You Get Them?," *interviewing people with various jobs and educational backgrounds, and* "How Did You Get Here?," *discussing the lives and research of prominent Korean Studies scholars. She is a certified Qigong instructor and a coach specializing in helping undergraduate and graduate students navigate their academic journeys. Walsh is also an archaeologist who has worked in Korea and China, and is particularly proud of her book,* Mahan and Baekje: The Complex Origins of Korean Kingdoms. *You can learn more about Walsh's teaching, coaching, and podcast hosting at momentuscoaching.com.*

My Cat Ate My Comfort Zone

By Rory Walsh

This is the story of Margot, a recently rescued tuxedo cat, and how she curled up in my heart and broke it open.

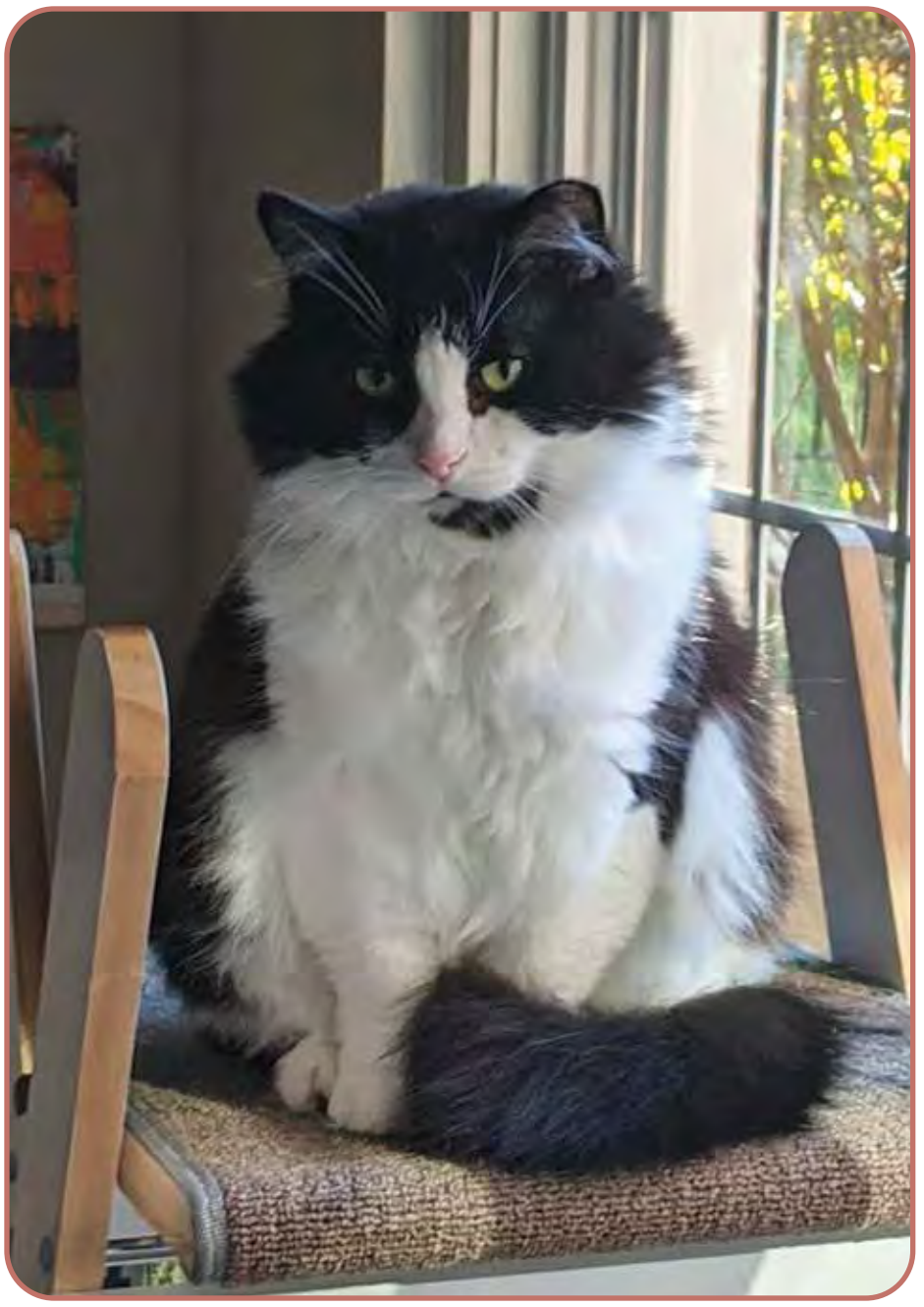
The last pet I'd had was a magnificent blue betta fish named Haku. He'd been my only roommate for a couple years, but eventually I had to give him away so I could spend the summer overseas. I was 30. It did not escape me that by the time my mother was 30 she'd had four kids, and here I was shedding the responsibility of a fish you buy in a plastic cup.

At that time in my life, I felt an urgent need to keep my world small. If there was no one in my life depending on me day to day, then there was no one I could let down. I had a small group of amazing friends and as long as it stayed small enough, I could keep up with all of them and remember everyone's birthday. My family were all in different states, and if I didn't have anything pinning me down, I could visit them at least once or twice a year. I was perpetually single but mostly unbothered by it. I enjoyed my own company and hadn't met anyone whose presence I thought I'd prefer to my solitude, or to that comfortable sense of control.

> I had so much love in my life but at arm's length, and that worked for me. Love wasn't something that I came home to, but something I carried with me.

I had so much love in my life but at arm's length, and that worked for me. Love wasn't something that I came home to, but something I carried with me. I got to spend a lot of time with my niece when she was little, even though she was a five-hour train ride away. I got to fly to the other side of the world once or twice a year without worrying about anything back home.

I felt lightweight, nimble, and untethered. Only when I moved to Ann Arbor in 2018 did that same strategy start to make me feel adrift.



This is the story of Margot, a recently rescued tuxedo cat, and how she curled up in my heart and broke it open.

Ready for change, I was clueless as to where to start. I guess I hadn't realized I'd let things get as bad as they did, because the people I met here were so kind and welcoming, they made me feel like I could be myself in ways I'd been avoiding for years. I was eager to pull the rest of my personality out of storage, to find some ballast in my life, and figure out a new way to be me.

In April of 2019, something clicked. I needed a cat.

A dog would be too much, too soon. Another fish, not enough. But a cat—a cat would depend on me just enough to help me remember how to do this.

I hit the jackpot. She was a street cat who'd had enough kittens to earn the nickname "Mama Kitty." She insisted on being let inside a Detroit apartment building during a vicious cold snap the previous January. The residents set her up in the laundry room, thinking she was feral, but soon learned she was a total sweetheart.

A dog would be too much, too soon. Another fish, not enough. But a cat—a cat would depend on me just enough to help me remember how to do this.

She was scruffy, shy, and had the tip of her left ear snipped off from when she'd been trapped, spayed, and released. She was also self-possessed and positively regal. She needed an old-fashioned, important-sounding name, so I called her Margot. When I got her, her fur was just long enough not to call her a shorthair, but the indoor, adored life agreed with her, and she was soon luxuriously fluffy. She loved playing but hated all toys, except catnip mice and my bare feet. She ate too fast, so I had to buy a robot that gave her four small meals throughout the day. She started coming to the door to greet me when I got home in the evening, purring her loud, ragged purr. At night, I could set my hand palm up on the bed, and she would set her head on it and sleep curled up next to me.

Of course, I did still have to travel sometimes, and I worried about Margot terribly when I left. I recruited people I really trusted as cat sitters and told them that she would probably hide at first but could be lured out with treats. "She loves people, she just has a hard time making herself vulnerable," I said, and immediately had to suppress a laugh at how I'd accidentally described myself.

The love and trust I shared with Margot made more love and trust seem possible. And she hadn't just made me think I could invite another person into our world, she set a bar for how wonderful that person would have to be. So, when I met a cute guy at work, I took some time and considered what I could tell about his character. I noticed that he could find a way to connect with any of our coworkers, from age 22 to 72. He got excited about their interests, and nerdy about his own. He'd show around interesting books he found. Everyone I'd come to like so much at work liked him—the quirky, friendly, chill, and cheerful guy with the buff physique and gorgeous hair… maybe that last part was just me.

It took me months to talk myself into it, but I finally asked him out for drinks. We had a great time, hugged, and parted. I had to process it for a few days, but thanks to Margot, I finally understood that I could have something for myself, and it wouldn't mean there was less of me for others. It might mean there would be more.

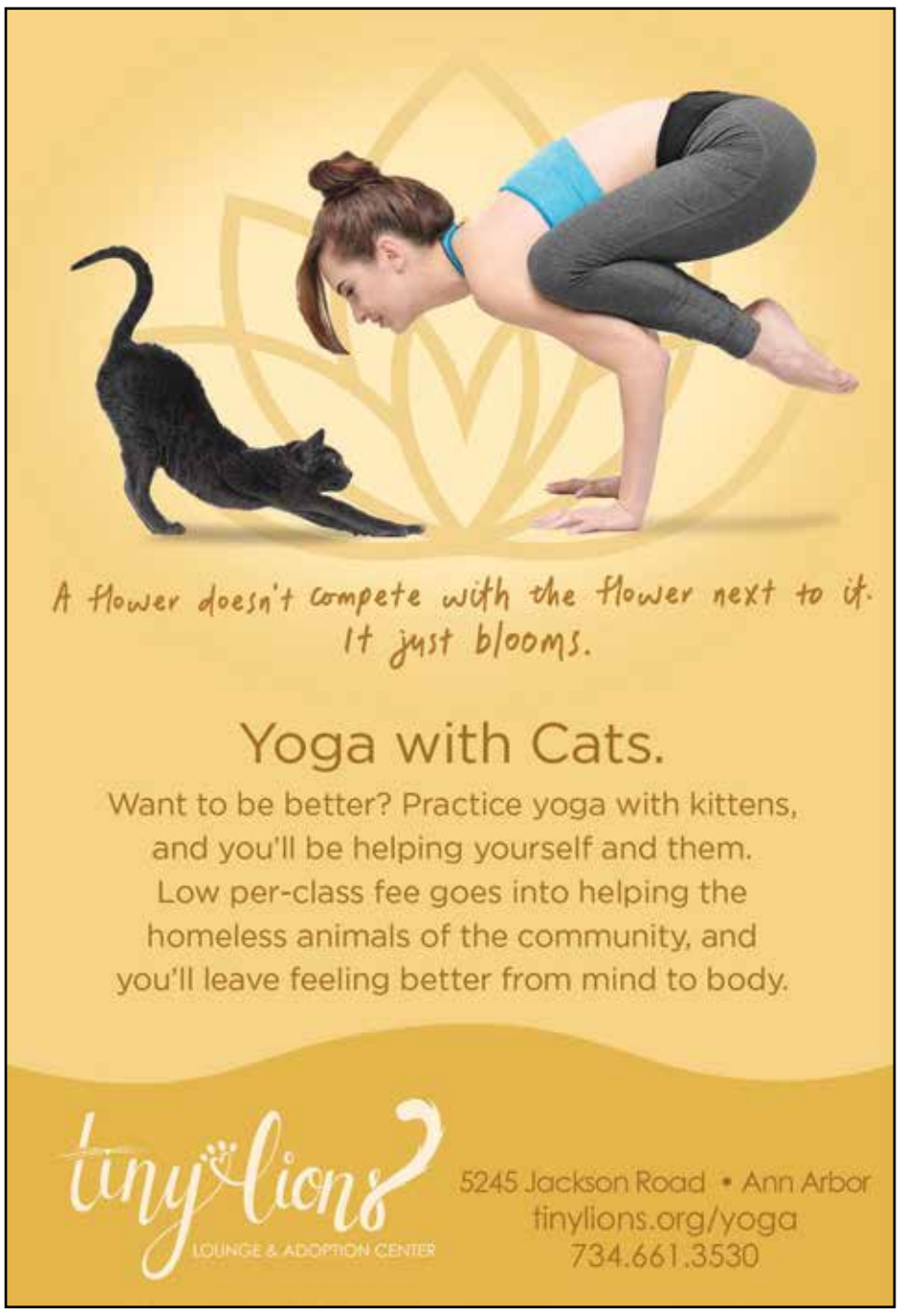
That Friday, with a second date set for after work, I rushed around my apartment getting ready to catch the bus. I looked over at Margot sitting on my desk chair. I went over to her, kneeling down to give her a kiss and a snuggle. I told her that something might happen, someone might come over, and if they did, it might be scary for her. Looking her in her sweet golden eyes I said, "I want you to know it was you who made me brave enough."

The love and trust I shared with Margot made more love and trust seem possible. And she hadn't just made me think I could invite another person into our world, she set a bar for how wonderful that person would have to be.

He did come over, and kept coming over, and soon he and Margot were best friends. She barely even hid–I'd never had anything to worry about. I'd picked the right person.

At the time I adopted Margot, she was the biggest step out of my comfort zone I could imagine. Even though we lost her to cancer near the end of 2021, and less than two months after I lost my father, she continues to inspire me to expand my heart. There is no such thing as enough time with someone you love. And there's no such thing as too much love to add to your life.

P.S. Haku the fish lived an unusually long and presumably happy life in his new home. My husband and I adopted a kitten in the spring of 2022. Chili is a tremendous delight, who teaches us many life lessons of his own.


A flower doesn't compete with the flower next to it.
It just blooms.
Yoga with Cats.
Want to be better? Practice yoga with kittens,
and you'll be helping yourself and them.
Low per-class fee goes into helping the
homeless animals of the community, and
you'll leave feeling better from mind to body.
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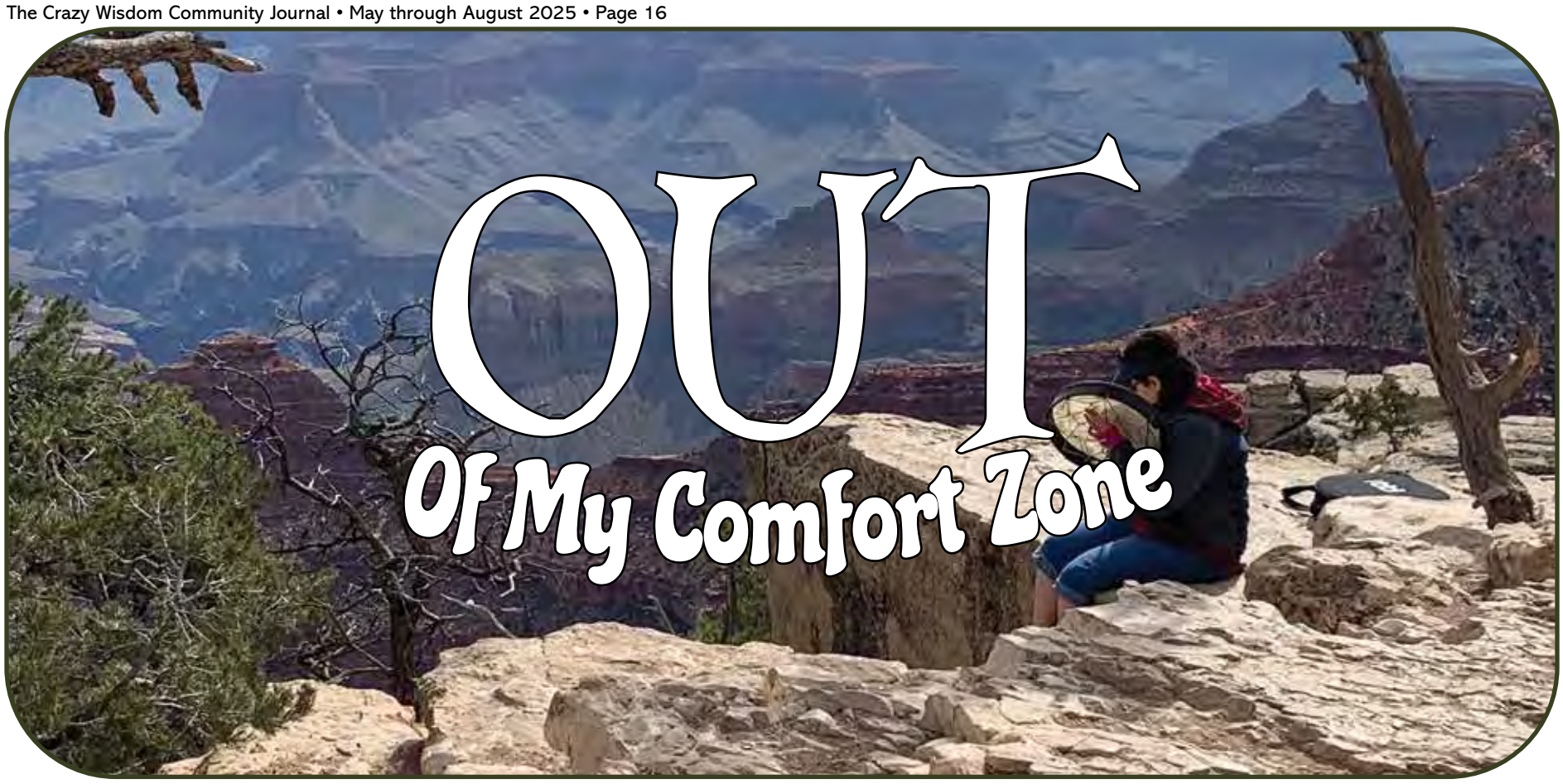


OUT Of My Comfort Zone

Julie Tumbarello *holds both a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology, with minors in Southeast Asian Studies and Women's Studies, and a Master of Arts in Anthropology from Northern Illinois University. In 1995, she received a Fulbright Scholarship to conduct research in Sulawesi, Indonesia, where her work with shamanic birth attendants and the Sulawesi Department of Public Health culminated in her master's thesis, "Mothers, Midwives, and Modern Medicine: An Analysis of Choice in the Birth Experience."*

Currently, Tumbarello serves as a Senior Research Leader in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Michigan. She is also a Level 3 Certified Active Dream Teacher through Robert Moss' Dream School. As a dream teacher, she works both individually and leads group workshops, sharing her passion for helping others tap into the power of dreams. In her spare time, you'll find her travelling to visit her dreaming community or near one of the Great Lakes spending time with her family rock hunting. Visit her online at dreamingjulie.com or email her at info@dreamingjulie.com.

Finding Light in the Darkness: Stepping Out Of My Comfort Zone and a Call to Change

By Julie Tumbarello

To jump or not to jump? As I stood in the corner of a six-story parking structure looking down, my thoughts were flooded with pain. Looking up from time to time I would notice the beauty of the colors in the sky as the sun started to set. These were fleeting moments with a heavy darkness and continual thoughts of all the horrors, terror, fear, and pain in the world and my own life. I had felt this way for many months, and it had gotten worse in the weeks leading up to this first attempt to end it all. It took several forces to align, including multiple police, guides, and people around me that loved me, to get me off that parking structure ledge.

I'd say I was uncomfortable my entire life, culminating in the above episode in my early 30s. Like many people, I was resistant to change and stepping out of the familiar. But the old ways of doing things didn't work anymore and there weren't any role models who could teach me how to do it all and do it well. The voices in my head were critical of every aspect of my life, and I felt like I was failing at all of it.

To jump or not to jump? As I stood in the corner of a six-story parking structure looking down, my thoughts were flooded with pain.

I tried making changes but for the next seven years, I continued to revisit that parking structure, railroad tracks, and even considered other ways to end it all. I wanted change, but not in the way I was being called. I remember reading *Eat Pray Love* and resonated with breaking down and running away to recreate who I was. The thing is, most of us can't do that. I had two small children, a job, and many other responsibilities, but what I was doing wasn't working. I needed help. What I didn't know was that help would come to me in my dreams.

In 2007 my dad died from kidney cancer. Looking back on it now, it was a sacred experience being witness to someone's crossing over, but at the time it was extremely painful, and it once again sent me to a very dark place. But this time, a few months after his passing, my dad started appearing in my dreams.

The first dream was a simple visit. In the dream we both recognized he was dead, but we spent time catching up. I remember he was sitting in a chair, and I was kneeling down on the floor next to him. I told him how sad I was and all the things going wrong in my life. I laid my head in his lap and cried. He comforted me and explained that he could help and support me more now from the other side than he could when he was alive. I woke up from that first dream feeling so much love… and a glimmer of hope.

Many months later, my dad appeared again. He came into my house and told me to get out. I could feel that there was some danger coming my way. I remember talking to him and justifying my relationship, just as I would have done when he was alive. I didn't leave. Soon after that dream, I started having severe abdominal pain. After an ER visit, doctor's appointments and tests, my dad again returned in a dream. This time I was in a different house. My dad was more worried and with some urgency told me I needed to leave and get my kids out.

Julie and her dad in 2005.

I remember looking into a mirror and seeing a small black spider come out of the glass. I smashed the spider to kill it, and in the process, I cracked the glass. A horde of spiders came pouring out from behind the mirror. My dad yelled "Get out! They won't hurt me, and I'll protect you as much as I can by holding them off. But you have to get out!" I woke up with the sense that the spiders represented some illness just beyond this realm that was about to manifest in my body. I knew I had to make drastic changes.

Getting out of the darkness, making real change, was not a sprint, but a marathon. It took several years, a lot of guidance and support (both in this world and beyond), and it came through small choices every day—finding little pieces of relief along the way. I knew the first step of moving out of my comfort zone and making real change was to address the voices in my head.

A few months after his passing, my dad started appearing in my dreams... He comforted me and explained that he could help and support me more now from the other side than he could when he was alive. I woke up from that first dream feeling so much love... and a glimmer of hope.

In 2008 Eckhart Tolle rereleased his book *A New Earth*. I remember reading the words "the voice in my head is not who I am" and the immense relief it brought. I had lived with dark thoughts telling me what a horrible person, mother, employee, and friend I was. The idea that those thoughts were not my true essence was life changing. I stepped out of my comfort zone by dedicating time daily to meditation. It was hard. Monkey mind is real! But over the course of several months, I started to sense that eternal essence.

Even with meditation, the thoughts were relentless. I needed more tools, so, in 2009 I started exploring different healing modalities. I took Reiki training, worked with a hypnotherapist, read over 50 books on spirituality in less than a year, and I started working with a craniosacral therapist who had trained with John Friedlander. I found her techniques powerful, so I started studying directly with Friedlander as well. I learned that not only are we not our thoughts, but we could be carrying around energies that are not our own. Through some core practices, I was able to recognize my authentic energy and differentiate it from others. This was a game changer and allowed me to not only understand the chaotic voices in my head but helped me clear them out. The tools and practices that Friedlander teaches helped me clear my energy, my thoughts, and to begin making real changes in my life.

At the end of 2009, I had a vivid nightmare where I was being chased on an island by people intent on killing me. Although several guides tried to protect me, I eventually had to fight alone. I ended up killing the mercenary woman, but in the dream, I knew she would come back unless I opened up her head and poured her brains into the water surrounding the island. The experience was so intense that I woke up crying and remained emotional over the next several days. With the help of multiple healers, I came to realize that the person I was fighting represented my old self. The next phase of my journey was to let go of my old self, my old brain, and to allow the new version of me to emerge.

During a dream journey, I encountered the Julie who had jumped from the parking structure. When I asked myself why I hadn't jumped while she did, the clear answer emerged: I could always see the light.

To change my ingrained thought patterns, I needed to step out of my comfort zones and consciously think differently. Imagine a board with engraved grooves on it. If you take a marble and send it down the board, it will follow the existing grooves. If we don't want to follow the old grooves, we need to work at making new grooves. Similarly, we must repeatedly redirect our thoughts, gradually forming and deepening new grooves until they become the default pattern. One of the key practices that helped me create new patterns was through daily appreciations. During my daily commute, even on challenging days, I would focus on what I appreciated in life—from simple things like my breath to the people I worked with, my family or friends. Changing thought patterns is not easy. It requires stepping out of your comfort zone and being conscious of every thought. With many, many choices, lots of practice, and time I was able to rewire my brain.

"Who am I?" This was the question that came in a dream. I struggled to answer. While I had made some change, I still felt lost. I needed a new path forward. In 2010 I was introduced to Robert Moss and Active Dreaming. (I wrote about this experience in a previous article, "Active Dreaming and Messages From the Birds," crazywisdomjournal.com/thecrazywisdomjournalonline/2015/9/1/active-dreaming-and-messages-from-the-birds). Through dream teacher trainings and workshops with Moss, I not only found the tools and practices I needed to heal my wounds but through working with dreams, synchronicities and imagination, I found a new path forward. I started using active dreaming in all aspects of my life, receiving guidance and messages constantly. It felt as though I was becoming the authentic person the universe had always intended for me to be.

During a dream journey, I encountered the Julie who had jumped from the parking structure. When I asked myself why I hadn't jumped while she did, the clear answer emerged: I could always see the light. Even though it was small amidst so much darkness, I was able to hold onto it. However, the lesson from that version of Julie, is that even if we lose sight of the light, there are guides who can help us find our way. The light is always there, waiting for us to be open and seek it out. I now realize that when I was on the parking structure, the universe provided guides to me by working through others and small signs. All played roles in supporting me through these difficult times.

I spent many years in the darkness, and then several more stepping out of my comfort zone, making changes, learning practices, techniques, and healing wounded parts of myself. Through active dreaming, I found not only the path forward but was then equipped to make the most significant change yet—ending my 20-year marriage. My dad was in my dreams and the universe provided communication through synchronicity and coincidences to help me make that major life change.

There are still moments and times in my life that I'm uncomfortable and called to change.

In her song "I Am Here," Pink sings, "I've already seen the bottom so there's nothing to fear." I've been to that dark bottom and by stepping out of my comfort zone, making changes and following my dreams, I came out on the other side. I AM here and I have nothing to fear.

I now lead Active Dreaming groups and workshops, utilizing the tools I've gathered along the way. My personal healing experiences are core to my teaching practices. The pivotal moment on the ledge of that parking structure is the basis for an inspiring dream journey that I lead others through. I help them move from being on the brink in dark places, to discovering their own paths to healing. There are still moments and times in my life that I'm uncomfortable and called to change. Using the tools I've gained I'll face any new uncomfortable challenges as I have before by holding onto the light and following my dreams.

YOUR COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT GUIDE
Ellen M. Craine
I believe that grief is a deeply personal journey, as unique as the individual experiencing it. Grief is a reaction we all experience to a loss, heartbreak, difficult diagnoses, and life transitions. Grief is often misunderstood as "simply" sadness or depression, or a period of mourning; it is much more than that. It is also a process of self discovery through exploring a wide range of emotions and experiences. My goal is to guide you and support you on your journey with compassion.
Scan QR code to visit griefdoula.co

Local Author Colby Halloran, and Her New Book, *The Northeast Corner*

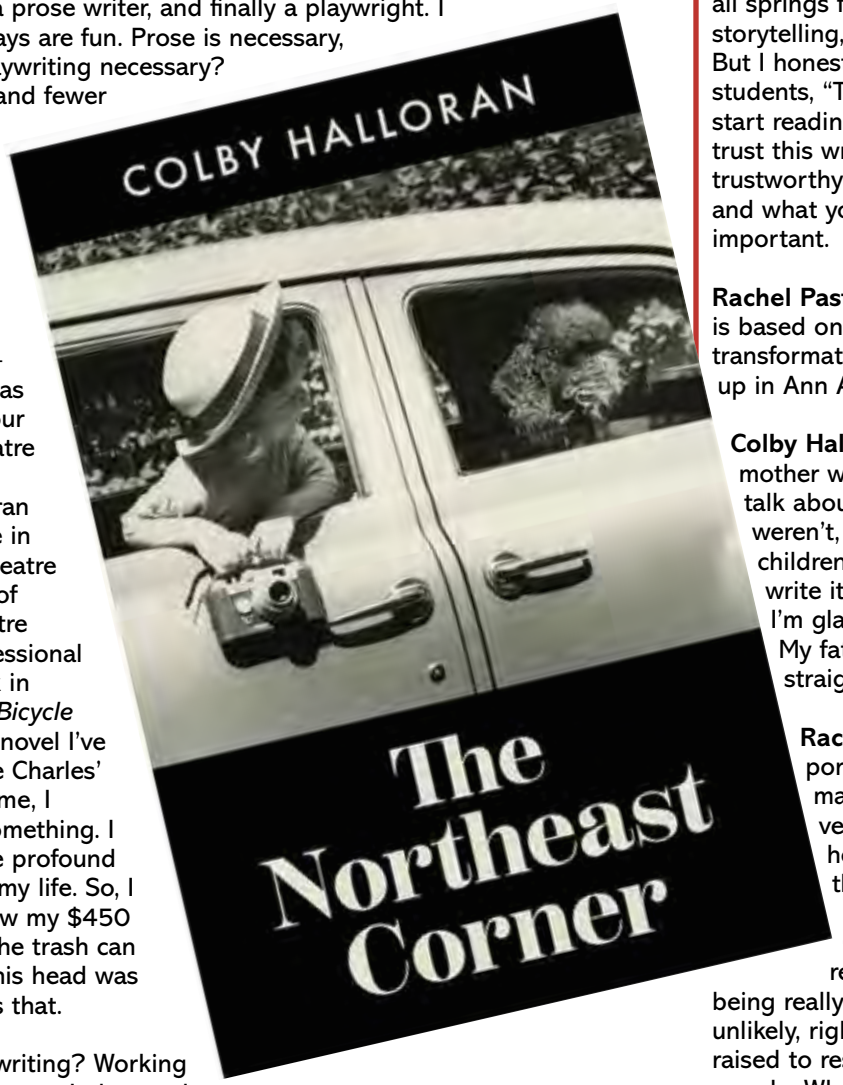
By Rachel Pastiva

Colby Halloran was born and raised in Ann Arbor. She studied acting at Wayne State University's Hilberry Gateway Theater and moved to New York City where she became an actress and playwright. Returning to Ann Arbor in 2006, she wrote about her life experiences. Her first book, The Northeast Corner*, chronicles a chapter of her youth growing up in Ann Arbor from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. It was published in October 2024 by the Ann Arbor District Library's Fifth Avenue Press.*

Colby will be appearing in conversation with Rachel Pastiva in the Crazy Wisdom Celestial Lounge on May 15th. Join us for a thought-provoking discussion on life paths, memory, and writing it all down.

Rachel Pastiva: You have spent most of your career as a playwright and actress, but I see that in addition to your recently published book, *The Northeast Corner*, you are working on three other book projects. What inspired you to change direction and start writing books instead of plays?

Colby Halloran: Theatre came before writing. First, I was a costume designer, then an actress and a prose writer, and finally a playwright. I love writing plays. Plays are fun. Prose is necessary, but it's not fun. Is playwriting necessary? I think so, but fewer and fewer plays are getting produced.



You ask what inspired me to change direction? I have a date for that. On June 10, 1981—44 yrs ago—my theatre partner was run over in front of our off-off-Broadway theatre in lower Manhattan. Charles and I jointly ran a 50-seat loft theatre in Tribeca called The Theatre Exchange. The story of Charles and our theatre and how I left a professional acting career to work in his theatre is told in *Bicycle Boy*—the autofiction novel I've just finished. Because Charles' death was so gruesome, I needed to give up something. I needed to handle the profound change this made in my life. So, I gave up acting. I threw my $450 Paul Huntley wig in the trash can ten feet from where his head was crushed and that was that.

How/why did I start writing? Working with Charles for two years, I observed him write. I observed his struggle to say what he wanted to say. He was adapting a Stephen Crane story for our theatre. I had to write press releases and acknowledgements after he died. That was the beginning. My husband at that time encouraged me to take a writing class at The New School. I studied with Richard Brickner. I won't tell that story now. Another life changer. Richard was encouraging. I started writing short stories. Three were published. Many more have never been published. I don't think I'm a short story writer.

I began writing the play *Bird of Passage* around 2010. It consumed me for about eight years. I did a lot of research, all the while working on various short stories. The premiere in Maine was not until 2019. How I decided to write it is a great story—for another day.

Rachel Pastiva: What differences and similarities have you found in storytelling using these two mediums?

Colby Halloran: In playwriting, the circumstances and background have to emerge naturally through dialogue. The sets and costumes can only tell so much. Some playwrights give their characters long monologues with back stories. Some don't. I never studied playwriting. The characters should each have unique voices, rhythms, and vocabularies.

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The playwright has to hear all these voices and render them. The action all springs from the circumstances the characters get themselves into. In storytelling, the narrator steers what the reader is supposed to be focusing on. But I honestly can't talk very well about writing prose. Richard would tell his students, "That paragraph about the dog in the driveway? Press on it." When I start reading a book or a story, I ask myself at the bottom of page one, "Can I trust this writer with my life?" Because books can change us. If I don't feel I'm in trustworthy hands, I don't keep reading. Establishing your moral compass and what you care about as a writer at the very beginning is hard but hugely important.

Rachel Pastiva: Though told in the form of fiction, *The Northeast Corner* is based on your personal life and is a snapshot of a tragic and very transformative time in your life, the late 1950s through the late 1960s, growing up in Ann Arbor. Why did you feel this particular story needed to be told?

Colby Halloran: It didn't have to be told. My father died when I was 18 and mother when I was 28. A friend who knew me back then said, "You always talk about your high school years as if they were gloriously happy. They weren't, Colby. Admit it." That haunted me. As it turns out, my sister's children have all said, "I never knew my grandparents. Now I do." But I didn't write it for them. Their response was a bonus. I'm proud of my family. And I'm glad that I dared to study my parents with their own gifts and flaws. My father always said, "Tell it straight." That gave me courage to tell it as straight as I could.

Rachel Pastiva: I was touched by the honest and loving way you portrayed your parents. Even though they were flawed and sometimes made painful choices, you never passed judgement on them and spoke very matter-of-factly about who they were. Is that perspective of them how you felt at the time, or do you think it's one you have acquired through hindsight?

Colby Halloran: I was telling someone the other day that I cannot recall ever shouting at my parents. Not once. And I can't remember being really angry with them. If anything, I was in perpetual awe. It sounds unlikely, right? Maybe someday I'll recall some God awful fight we had, but I was raised to respect my elders which wasn't hard. I was surrounded by impressive people. What I don't include in *The Northeast Corner* is my early years (ages 4-8) when I bewildered my parents with my refusal to eat and my refusal to go anywhere. They took me to a child psychiatrist who said, "Something frightened

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her, but she'll be okay." I decided not to deal with that—it was so far back. But their patience and love for me during those bewildering years was something I palpably felt and was grateful for. It's become more popular now to expose and reveal the horrors of one's childhood. I'm not being Pollyanna about my parents. Ask my cousins. I just lucked out. They were remarkable people—not perfect–but still remarkable and they set a very high bar. My father taught me all an artist has to give is themselves. Their truest self. How they see and what they can do with their hands and brains and what they care about. My mother taught me to cherish people, not things.

Rachel Pastiva: Your ancestral home is an important character in the first part of your book, but due to unforeseen circumstances, you are forced to leave it. How do you think we are shaped by the places where we live?

Colby Halloran: Not everyone is attached to where they live. I have friends who can't recall when and where they lived as a child. I have lived in about 30 different places in 76 years. I have trouble listing them in order, but I remember them vividly, each and every one. Some people just don't notice. My cold cottage in Ireland was memorable because there was no heat or electricity, but my memory of it is how cozy I was in bed under a pile of blankets with five hot water bottles, reading by oil lamp, cows grazing outside. I have been extremely lucky never to have been homeless or miserable. Which is not to say I haven't slept on a lot of couches of a lot of friends.

Rachel Pastiva: I was moved by so many aspects of your book. But one of the real treats was getting to see what Ann Arbor was like in the 1950s and 1960s. I imagine that the Ann Arbor of today is unrecognizable from that of your youth. Are there any aspects of that city that you still recognize in Ann Arbor today?

Colby Halloran: My family church, St. Andrew's Episcopal on N. Division, hasn't changed that much. It's not as sedate as it once was, but the values are the same and their mission to help others has only deepened. The Nickels Arcade, Forest Hills Cemetery, and the Arboretum. The old train station is a fabulous restaurant. They don't have gum ball machines anymore, but they serve delicious food and the Wolverine [an Amtrak train that runs through Ann Arbor] still goes by. My mother used to call Ann Arbor "this once-village of ours." It wasn't a village when I was growing up, but yes, it has changed. This isn't the place to talk about the sprawl. I'm glad to be living in a university town. My husband needs libraries!

Learn more about Colby Halloran and her books on her website at colbyhalloran.com.

BOOK SUEY
Where Books, Art, and Community Collide

Story and Photos By Cashmere Morley

To liken Book Suey to an average bookstore would be akin to calling Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* "the boy next door." It's missing all the other crucial pieces that make Book Suey a must-stop destination—sure, you *can* come in for a book, but you can also stop in and read a poem during open-mic night, attend a writing workshop, sell a physical copy of your writing, and more. Think of Book Suey as a bookstore with a side of DIY ethos, a pinch of mischief, and the kind of vibes that make you want to stay a while. Maybe even forever, as co-owners Cat Batsios and Elijah "Eli" Sparkman will explain.

"Once upon a time, this was a bank," said Batsios. "But not *Bank Suey* [as the sign outside of the building displays], that was fourth in the order of operations." She points to the ground, which is a mixture of tile and brick. "As you can tell, this building is old: pre-war. In the early 2000s it was turned into a Chinese restaurant called Golden Hill." (Thus, the Chinese decorations sprinkled throughout the building, such as the dragon symbols hung in the bathroom, and the reused kitchenry like the brown diner mugs in the tea and coffee area.) ".... And then the current owners restored the building and guided this beautiful space, and they made it into a community space," Sparkman finishes.

Just like the works within it, the bookstore is a patchwork of ideas, places, and people—some still living, some long gone. This cooperative gem is where bibliophiles and casual readers can unite over an ever-rotating collection of reads. Whether you're into *New York Times* best-selling works, obscure zines, local authors, or novels so indie they are bound in front of you at the store, Book Suey has you covered. Plus, it's a co-op, which means you can be part of the magic—literally. You can join as a member, have a say on what is sold in store, and bask in the beauty of knowing you're not just buying and selling books; you're building community in Hamtramck.

As much as Book Suey values its sense of community, it thrives because of its diverse programming. Workshops at Book Suey cover a vast range of topics, from the craft of writing to self-publishing. The events are tailored for everyone—whether you're a seasoned author or someone just testing the waters of creative writing. From novice writers sharing their first short stories to poets reading their works aloud for the first time, there's a space for everyone. The bookstore serves as a dynamic platform where the community's voice can be heard and celebrated.

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Even if you're not a writer or poet yourself, the events provide a welcoming space to get inspired by the creations of others. It's not just about reading and writing—it's about becoming part of a creative movement. Every week feels like an opportunity to contribute to something bigger, and visitors leave Book Suey not only with books in hand but with ideas, motivation, and connections that reach beyond the pages they just perused.

In 2017, Book Suey was founded by four original co-owners. "They had a lot of books already when they [founded Book Suey]," said Sparkman, though not so many books as to rival a common bookstore. He said at the start of the space, the co-owners had only two or three shelves they would wheel out only at certain hours. They also did a lot of popups until word started to spread and inventory became more robust with both indie and popular titles over the years.

Batsios notes that becoming a co-owner at Book Suey means you have to work three to four shifts a month at the store. "We all take shifts together [if you're a co-owner.] We all make decisions together about what events to run, what books to stock. It's all a collaborative effort." Co-owners are not paid; their time is solely volunteer, which Batsios notes is an interesting dynamic of co-owning because it means you set firmer boundaries with your time and limits in the space.

Sparkman added, "All four [original] owners volunteer their time to work shifts, pick up books for inventory, and meet monthly to problem solve issues that are top of mind, just like [all the current co-owners] do. That's the foundation of how this place stays in business. Everything else is icing on the cake—this place can be a vehicle to bring your own passions and interests," he said.

Sparkman, who has been a co-owner at Book Suey for two years, says he understands his role in Book Suey as an "event coordinator and community writing club facilitator." He said one of his favorite events he runs at Book Suey is a free flash fiction club which is now in its third year of running. "That's my personal interest [that I bring to the space], but there are 14 co-owners here. It's interesting to see how [other co-owners] want to plug into a bookstore/co-op/third space." A *third space*, as defined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, is a "social surrounding that is separate from the two usual social environments of home ("first place") and the workplace ("second place") such as a church, museum, cafe, or library."

> What makes Book Suey's sense of community even more special is its ability to foster genuine, lasting connections. People who may have come for a book or a single event often find themselves becoming regulars, seeking out friendships, creative partnerships, and even opportunities for personal growth.

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Just like the works within it, the bookstore is a patchwork of ideas, places, and people–some still living, some long gone.

Co-owners Riley Rinnan, Eli Sparkman, and Jean Khut strike a pose.

creative partnerships, and even opportunities for personal growth. It's not just the events that matter—it's the friendships that sprout from shared experiences. When you walk through the doors of Book Suey, you're stepping into a space that isn't merely transactional; it's one where bonds are made, conversations are sparked, and creativity flows in every corner.

"The crux of this space is the openness that all of us, together, create," said Batsios. "People come into the store just to hang out. That's how you know you actually have a third space—people treat this space like their best friend's house. They walk in and grab a coffee before saying hello. That's the equivalent of walking into your friend's house and just opening the fridge."

As much as Book Suey values its sense of community, it thrives because of its diverse programming. Workshops at Book Suey cover a vast range of topics, from the craft of writing to self-publishing.

Batsios said that they ultimately want Book Suey to become a place where artists can express themselves freely through their chosen mediums. "It's not safe," said Batsios. "The world is not a safe place for artists to practice, to be open. *But*—you can come to Book Suey. I feel like people roll in and find this place when they need to."

Community involvement is a large part of Book Suey's success. Both Batsios and Sparkman talk about a program called *Breaking the Cycle with Books* which the Western International High School in Detroit takes part in. The program raises money to take their students on book tours around the area. Sparkman talked about how special their stop at Book Suey was.

"They raise money to give each student two or three books of their choosing. There's a beauty to it—they aren't just giving students books that no one wants. They are coming in and choosing books they want to read. They have the agency to choose whatever gives them purpose. We had the honor of hosting them one afternoon," said Sparkman.

"It's a lesson in inhabiting spaces that may seem inaccessible to you. As a kid, you don't know where you're allowed to go or what you're allowed to be interested in. Here, kids could choose what they wanted to read about and have a discussion about it with their peers. That's something we are really proud to be a part of here," said Batsios.

"Our success [as a store] can really only be measured over a number of years," adds Sparkman. "There isn't one event that stands out—it's a culmination of artists coming together here on a weekly basis that makes us special."
For Sparkman, Book Suey will never be a Barnes and Nobel or an Amazon, and he values that. "You don't have to come to Book Suey, but you should go somewhere [for your books]," he said. "You should go talk to people. You should tell them about yourself. This is all part of the novel human experience."
To become a member owner, you can send Book Suey an email at info@booksuey.com or just come in and chat with a staff member. Fill out an application, and the owners will meet and discuss if they feel you're a good fit for the team.

Visit Book Suey online at booksuey.com, on Facebook and Instagram @ booksuey, or check out their brick and mortar at 10345 Joseph Campau Avenue in Hamtramck, Wednesday through Friday from 6 to 9:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 6:00 p.m.

To get involved in a club, join Flash Fiction Club on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., Creative Nonfiction Club on Thursdays from 7:30 to 8:45 p.m., and Poetry Club on Saturdays from 4 to 6:00 p.m. Free events include Colors, an open-mic poetry event on Tuesdays, monthly field trips, and Second Sunday open mics.

BUDDHISM AND THE BEATS: AN AMERICAN CULTURAL SAGA

By Roger R. Jackson

(Editor's Note: We noticed a few issues back, that in our Calendar section was a class entitled Buddhism and the Beats, at Jewel Heart, the Ann Arbor-based Tibetan Buddhist Center. We reached out to the teacher, Roger Jackson, to write a brief essay for us on the subject.)

Alas this life I can't be kind and persuasive
Slip the Twelve-part chain off hundreds of shackled housewives
Present the Eight-fold path like the Ultimate Meaning
At all the gas stations in Samsara.

But, oh, my lamas, I want to
how I want to!
Just to see your old eyes shine in this Kaliyuga
stars going out around us like birthday candles
your Empty Clear Luminous and Unobstructed
Rainbow Bodies
swimming in and through us all like transparent fish.

Diane di Prima, "I Fail as a Dharma Teacher"

Diane di Prima

Buddhists comprise only around 1% of the U.S. population, yet Buddhism has exercised a disproportionate influence on American culture, especially since the end of World War II. Buddhist images, whether of Shakyamuni or Tibetan mandalas, seem ubiquitous. Buddhist-based mindfulness practices are taught in countless American institutions, from prisons, to schools, to hospitals. And influential cultural figures, including actor Richard Gere, composer Philip Glass, and poet Jane Hirshfield, speak openly of their Buddhist practice.

BUDDHISTS COMPRISE ONLY AROUND 1% OF THE U.S. POPULATION, YET BUDDHISM HAS EXERCISED A DISPROPORTIONATE INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN CULTURE, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II.

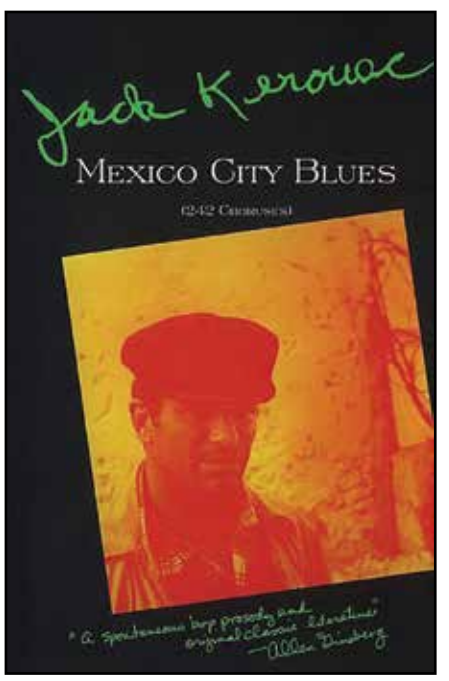
This is due partly to the longstanding presence of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists in the U.S., as well as the influence of more recent immigrants from Buddhist lands in southeast Asia. However, equally, if not more, significant are the continuing echoes of a turn toward Buddhism, in the 1950s and 1960s, by writers who were part of the so-called "Beat Generation."

THE BEAT MOVEMENT ORIGINATED IN NEW YORK CITY IN THE LATE 1940S, AMIDST A CIRCLE OF YOUNG, DISAFFECTED WRITERS, THAT CAME TO INCLUDE WILLIAM BURROUGHS, JACK KEROUAC, ALLEN GINSBERG, AND DIANE DI PRIMA.

The term "Beat" can refer to being downtrodden, or to a musical beat, as in Bebop jazz, or to a spiritual beatitude that many figures in the post-World War II American avant-garde sought to attain through radical experiments with consciousness-expansion, free-form sexual arrangements, resistance to mainstream politics, and a turn toward self-knowledge—all of which was expressed in "spontaneous," often free-form prose, poetry, and performance that defied convention and pushed the boundaries of life, art, and religion.

The Beat movement originated in New York City in the late 1940s, amidst a circle of young, disaffected writers, that came to include William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Diane di Prima. In the early 1950s, they forged connections with like-minded writers in San Francisco, such as Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and Michael McClure. In their pursuit of self-knowledge, many Beats came to focus on Buddhism—particularly the Great Vehicle, or Mahayana, versions dominant in East Asia and Tibet, with their promise of buddhahood for all beings and exhortation to follow the path of the compassionate, insightful bodhisattva in order to gain enlightenment.

[JACK KEROUAC] NEVER HAD A PROPER BUDDHIST TEACHER AND PROBABLY NEVER TRULY LEFT HIS CATHOLICISM BEHIND. STILL, HE PRODUCED IMPORTANT WORKS EXPRESSING HIS OFTEN PERCEPTIVE READING OF THE DHARMA.



In the 1950s, however, resources in America for the study of Buddhism were few: a handful of books that translated or explained classic Buddhist texts, the occasional big-city meditation or study center, and almost no qualified teachers. Nevertheless, various Beats delved into the Dharma as best they could, attempting to incorporate it into their lives and thoughts, and expressing their experiences and ideas in their writings. Here, we can only touch on three key figures.

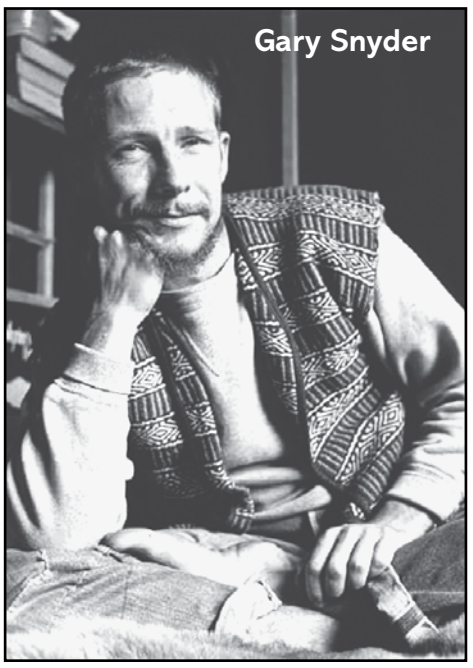
Jack Kerouac (1922–69) was born and buried a Roman Catholic in Lowell, Massachusetts, but began an intensive period of Buddhist study and practice in the early 1950s, based almost entirely in his reading of classic texts in translation. He rejected Zen as "mean," and identified himself with Buddhism's early, ascetic traditions but also with the deep wisdom and universal benevolence of the Mahayana. He never had a proper Buddhist teacher and probably never truly left his Catholicism behind. Still, he produced important works expressing his often perceptive reading of the Dharma. These included the 244 poetic "choruses" of *Mexico City Blues;* the novel, *The Dharma Bums*; his own "sutra," *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*; and a huge compendium of quotations, stories, poems, and journal entries, published posthumously as *Some of the Dharma*.

In the 239th Chorus of *Mexico City Blues,* Kerouac fuses his interest in Buddhism with an idealized image of the spontaneous Bop outpourings of one of the great jazz saxophonists of the era, proclaiming,

Charley Parker Looked like Buddha….

And his expression on his face
Was as calm, beautiful and profound
As the image of the Buddha
Represented in the East, the lidded eyes,
The expression that says "All is well."

In *The Dharma Bums,* Kerouac teaches his hiking companion, Japhy Ryder (modeled on Gary Snyder), the following prayer, which seems apposite in any age: "[Name of any particular person]: equally empty, equally to be loved, equally a coming Buddha."


Gary Snyder

Gary Snyder (1930–) began his exploration of Buddhism around the same time as Kerouac at Reed College in Oregon. He studied Chinese in graduate school, producing his own versions of Han Shan's *Cold Mountain Poems.* In 1956 he set sail for Japan where he lived off and on for almost fifteen years studying Rinzai Zen at several temples in Kyoto. He returned to the U.S. to live in 1969, settling in the foothills of the Sierras where he wrote poetry and essays. He became an influential environmentalist speaking of his deep appreciation for primal and Asian cultures, the mountains, trees, and rivers of the American west, and the vastness of geologic time. Buddhism is prominent throughout his work, especially in the essays of *Earth House Hold* and his many collections of poetry, most notably *Mountains and Rivers without End,* which he described as "a sort of sutra."

SNYDER SHOWS HIS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN A BUDDHIST GUISE BY IMAGINING SMOKEY THE BEAR AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE BUDDHA: "WRATHFUL BUT CALM, AUSTERE BUT COMIC, SMOKEY THE BEAR WILL ILLUMINATE THOSE WHO WILL HELP HIM; BUT FOR THOSE WHO WOULD HINDER OR SLANDER HIM, HE WILL PUT THEM OUT."

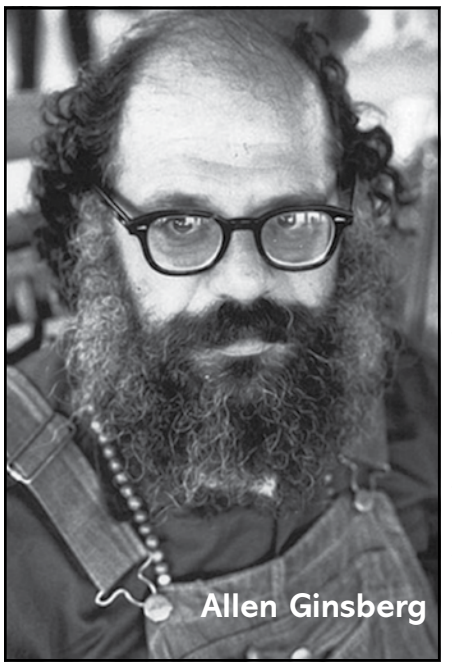
In one humorous text, the "Smokey the Bear Sutra," Snyder shows his environmental concerns in a Buddhist guise by imagining Smokey the Bear as a manifestation of the Buddha: "Wrathful but Calm, Austere but Comic, Smokey the Bear will Illuminate those who will help him; but for those who would hinder or slander him, HE WILL PUT THEM OUT." Elsewhere, in "Avocado," he likens the Dharma to a familiar fruit:

Some parts so ripe you can't believe it….
And other parts hard and green,
Without much flavor.…
…The great big round seed
In the middle,
Is your own Original Nature –
Pure and smooth.…

Allen Ginsberg (1926–97), who spent most of his life in New York City, was in some sense the "glue" that held the Beats together: with his seminal poem, "Howl," he became their first public hero, and he remained their greatest proponent throughout his life. He was interested in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, but after a chance meeting with Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in 1970, he became his disciple, focusing on Tibetan Buddhist practice and helping Trungpa to launch Naropa University, in Boulder, Colorado, which remains a repository of Beat lore. After Trungpa's death, he studied with another Tibetan lama, Gelek Rinpoche. Ginsberg's early interest in Buddhism is especially evident in poems such as "Sakyamuni Coming Out from the Mountain" and his *Indian Journals*; his later commitment to the tradition is quite pronounced in such collections as *Mind Breaths All Over the Place, White Shroud, Cosmopolitan Greetings,* and *Death and Fame*.

Ginsberg's long, Whitmanesque verses are difficult to excerpt, but one strikingly Buddhist observation from "Wichita Vortex Sutra" is emblematic:

(ALLEN GINSBERG) WAS INTERESTED IN BOTH HINDU AND BUDDHIST TRADITIONS, BUT AFTER A CHANCE MEETING WITH CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE IN 1970, HE BECAME HIS DISCIPLE, FOCUSING ON TIBETAN BUDDHIST PRACTICE AND HELPING TRUNGPA TO LAUNCH NAROPA UNIVERSITY, IN BOULDER, COLORADO, WHICH REMAINS A REPOSITORY OF BEAT LORE.


Allen Ginsberg

I come,
lone man from the void, riding a bus …
& the Methodist minister with cracked eyes …
a million dollars
in the bank owns all West Wichita
come to Nothing
Prajnaparamita Sutra over coffee—Vortex
of telephone radio aircraft assembly
frame ammunition
petroleum nightclub Newspaper streets
illuminated by Bright
EMPTINESS—

The key "Beat Buddhists" we have surveyed, and others we have not, varied widely in their understanding of the Dharma and their approaches to it. What they shared, though, was a deep commitment to spiritual and poetic exploration through Buddhist images, symbols, ideas, and experiences. And as the influence of the Beat movement grew in America, and then world-wide, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the enthusiasm for the Dharma expressed by so many Beats helped lay the cultural groundwork for the acceptance of Buddhism in the West. Over the decades that followed, new traditions, new teachers, new texts, and new practices were introduced, and poets and artists continued the lineage of their Beat ancestors, by placing Buddhist themes at the center of their lives and works. Let the final word be that of Philip Whalen, who in "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" translates the famous mantra of the Heart Sutra as, "Gone/ gone/ REALLY gone/ Into the cool/ O MAMA!"

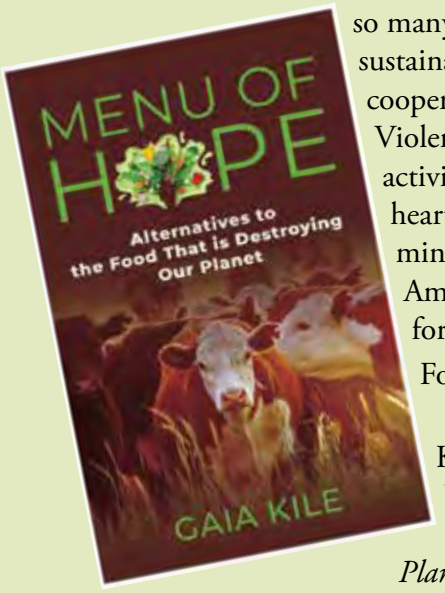
Roger Jackson is John W. Nason Professor of Asian Studies and Religion, Emeritus, at Carleton College, where he taught the religions of South Asia and Tibet for nearly three decades. He also has taught at the University of Michigan, Fairfield University, McGill University, and Maitripa College. iHs scholarly interests include Indic and Tibetan Buddhist systems of philosophy, meditation, and ritual; Buddhist religious poetry; the study of mysticism; religion in Sri Lanka; and the contours of modern Buddhist thought. He can be contacted by email at rjackson@carleton.edu.

Wednesday, June 4, 7 p.m. in
the Crazy Wisdom Lounge

An Evening with Gaia Kile

Author, Family Nurse Practitioner, Eco Philosopher and Community Activist

with Moderator Bill Zirinsky of Crazy Wisdom



For decades, Kile has been a leader within so many of Ann Arbor's holistic medicine, sustainability, healthy food/nutrition, cooperative living, personal growth, Non-Violent Communication, and political activism subcultures, which are at the heart of this city's progressive, body/mind/spirit, and conscious living ethos. Among many other roles, he is a former Board President of the Peoples Food Co-op.

Kile will be talking about his new book, *Menu of Hope – Alternatives to the Food that is Destroying Our Planet*, and answering questions about his life's journey, his meaningful and wonderful array of passionate involvements through the years, the gifts of family and community life, and his vision for ways forward amid political volatility and climate change denialism. The evening will be a dynamic Q+A with longtime Crazy Wisdom owner, Bill Zirinsky, and with the audience.

For more information, contact Bill Zirinsky at: events@crazywisdom.net. Crazy Wisdom, 114 South Main Street, Ann Arbor, 48104. crazywisdom.net. (734) 665-2757

Getting to Know A Complete Unknown

By Richard Gull

"I'd like to believe that I wouldn't have been one of those infamous British people who tried to boo Dylan offstage when he went electric, but on the evidence of past form I very much fear I would have. We want our artists to remain as they were when we first loved them. But our artists want to move."

—Zadie Smith in *Some Notes on Attunement*

My Generation

I recently went twice to see *A Complete Unknown*, the biopic about Bob Dylan's early rise to stardom from 1961 until 1965 with Timothee Chalamet as Dylan. Both times the audience was mostly age fifty and up. I am eighty-five—two years older than Dylan. We are members of what is called, misleadingly, "The Silent Generation." The postwar generation are Boomers, who are associated with the upheavals of the 1960s, but as Dylan puts it in his memoir, *Chronicles, One,* "I had very little in common with, and knew even less about, a generation that I was supposed to be the voice of." The well-known movers of that era—Dylan, Warhol, Ginsberg, Baez, Beatles, Rolling Stones, and many others—are prewar or war babies.

On my second viewing of the film, I was accompanied by two friends my age. As the end credits rolled, Chalamet sings "Blowin' in the Wind" and we sang along in unison. A man with a cane, struggling past us still seated stragglers to exit the row, exclaimed, "That was our generation, wasn't it?" An elderly lady approached and sweetly took our hands. I mistakenly thought that she must be a friend of my friends, but she wasn't. I then figured that she was a sixties flower child grown old and was wordlessly linking hands with kindred spirits.

The postwar generation are Boomers, who are associated with the upheavals of the 1960s, but as Dylan puts it in his memoir, *Chronicles, One*, "I had very little in common with, and knew even less about, a generation that I was supposed to be the voice of."

In interviews Chalamet, who at twenty-nine is at the early end of Gen Z, expresses the hope that the film will reacquaint older generations with Dylan and introduce him to young people who know next to nothing about him. But can the sixties generation, who has forgotten its own distain for its elders, connect to a distracted Gen Z by means of an intergenerational cinematic postcard like "A Complete Unknown"?

Dylan points to this problem of generational struggle in his recent book, *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, in a chapter titled "My Generation: The Who." The Who's sixties song "My Generation" was a hate poem to the older generation.

"People try to put us d-down (talkin' 'bout my generation)
Just because we get around (talkin' 'bout my generation)
Things they do look awful c-cold (talkin' 'bout my generation)
I hope I die before I get old (talkin' 'bout my generation)"

He writes, "Each generation seems to have the arrogance of ignorance, opting to throw out what has gone before instead of building on the past." Yet young Dylan himself displayed contempt for age in the sixties when receiving the Tom Paine Society Award when he stated, "I consider myself young. It's not an old peoples' world anymore." And his song "The Times They Are A-Changing" is sung to the delight of a young audience in *A Complete Unknown*.

"Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly agin'"

In interviews Chalamet, who at twenty-nine is at the early end of Gen Z, expresses the hope that the film will reacquaint older generations with Dylan and introduce him to young people who know next to nothing about him. But can the sixties generation, who has forgotten its own distain for its elders, connect to a distracted Gen Z by means of an intergenerational cinematic postcard like "A Complete Unknown"?

Dylan's Guthrie-like language—a changin', agin'—and his tone, privilege the wisdom of the young over their elders. They see the world with fresh eyes. Myopic elders should not block changes that they fail to understand. Not only mothers and fathers, but senators and congressmen are being addressed, too. Both families and institutions should now heed the call of the young. The centers of power have shifted with the sands of time.

By contrast Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" introduces his most transcendent expression of intergenerational drama. Conflict and misunderstanding are replaced by a poetic discourse of curiosity and love.

"Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, where have you been, my darling young one."

The rambling son sings of a mythical journey to misty mountains, crooked highways, sad forests, and dead oceans. And: What did you see? What did you hear? Who did you meet? What'll you do now? The son reports on a black branch with blood that kept drippin', seeing one person starve, a man wounded in hatred, pellets of poison flooding the waters, a wave that could drown the whole world. He resolves to tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it. And reflect it from the mountains so all souls can see it. And he knows his song well before he starts singing. He warns in each repeating chorus that a hard rain's a gonna fall. The song evokes ancient mythical themes and language to talk about the broken world of the present. Its mystical numerology—twelve misty mountains, seven sad forests—add an epic tone to the journey. It does not protest or confront.

Dylan Receives the Nobel for Literature

When Dylan was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, "Hard Rain" was chosen as Dylan's signature song to be sung at the proceedings. The Nobel Committee seems to have recognized it as a dialogue between the curious parent and the wandering son discovering the brokenness of the world. It is a not a song of indignation but of resolve. But *A Complete Unknown* does Dylan a disservice by bluntly saying in the film's final postscript that he did

not show up at the ceremony, with no explanation given as to why. Given that the dénouement is Dylan going electric against the folk tradition, his no-show is framed as yet another characteristic act of rebellion. It implies that Dylan's action at age seventy-five is to be understood as analogous to his antiestablishment, rebel-with-a cause electrification at age twenty-five. He had stayed forever young. To paraphrase Johnny Cash's approval of his friend "BD's" actions, he was just leaving more mud on the carpet.

To be sure, the Swedish Academy's decision had its critics who encouraged this view by joking that some of its members had themselves gone electric: just as electrified music cannot be folk music, no music, however exalted, can be regarded as literature. This was "an ill-conceived nostalgia award wrenched from the rancid prostates of senile, gibbering hippies" wrote one critic. It was a category error.

Dylan's Guthrie-like language—a changin', agin'—and his tone, privilege the wisdom of the young over their elders. They see the world with fresh eyes. Myopic elders should not block changes that they fail to understand.

But the Academy anticipated skepticism. They defended their decision as a deliberate widening of the category of "literature." Salman Rushdie and poet Billie Collins approved. Collins argued that, unlike most modern song lyrics, Dylan's hold up on the page as poetry. The Committee's secretary pointed out that "Homer and Sappho wrote poetic texts that were meant to be listened to, were meant to be performed, often with musical instruments." "In a distant past, all poetry was sung or tunefully recited, poets were rhapsodes, bards, troubadours; "lyrics' comes from 'lyre.'" In 2008 Dylan had received a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation for "his profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power." The category of what is considered literature had already been widened. Such shifts can occur said the Committee. "When someone seizes upon a simple, overlooked form, discounted as art in the higher sense, and makes it mutate." Besides, through Dylan the Academy stood to gain in prestige by "cultural money laundering." Dylan was known as the author of antiwar protest songs in the sixties like "Masters of War." Alfred J. Nobel, the inventor of explosives, tried to distance himself from the stigma of being "a merchant of death" by rewarding contributions to peace. Some argued that the Nobel was unworthy of Dylan rather than Dylan being unworthy of a Nobel.

It is true that Dylan never went to Sweden to accept the award nor to deliver the mandatory Nobel lecture. Richard F. Thomas recounts that it took him two weeks to reply to the initial announcement because, unlike writers whose work stands alone on the page, Dylan was a working musician on his so-called Never Ending Tour. In the two weeks following the Nobel announcement Dylan performed eleven concerts in eight states, fueling speculation in the press that he was snubbing the award. But then he called saying, "The news about the Nobel Prize left me speechless. I appreciate the honor so much."

He delivered his Nobel lecture on tape with piano accompaniment, in the style of a talking blues. He said that in the beginning his musical influences were Buddy Holly and Leadbelly. *Moby Dick, The Odyssey*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front* were present to some degree in all of his work. He writes an epitaph to *All Quiet's* protagonist whose life is ended in a trench in World War I:

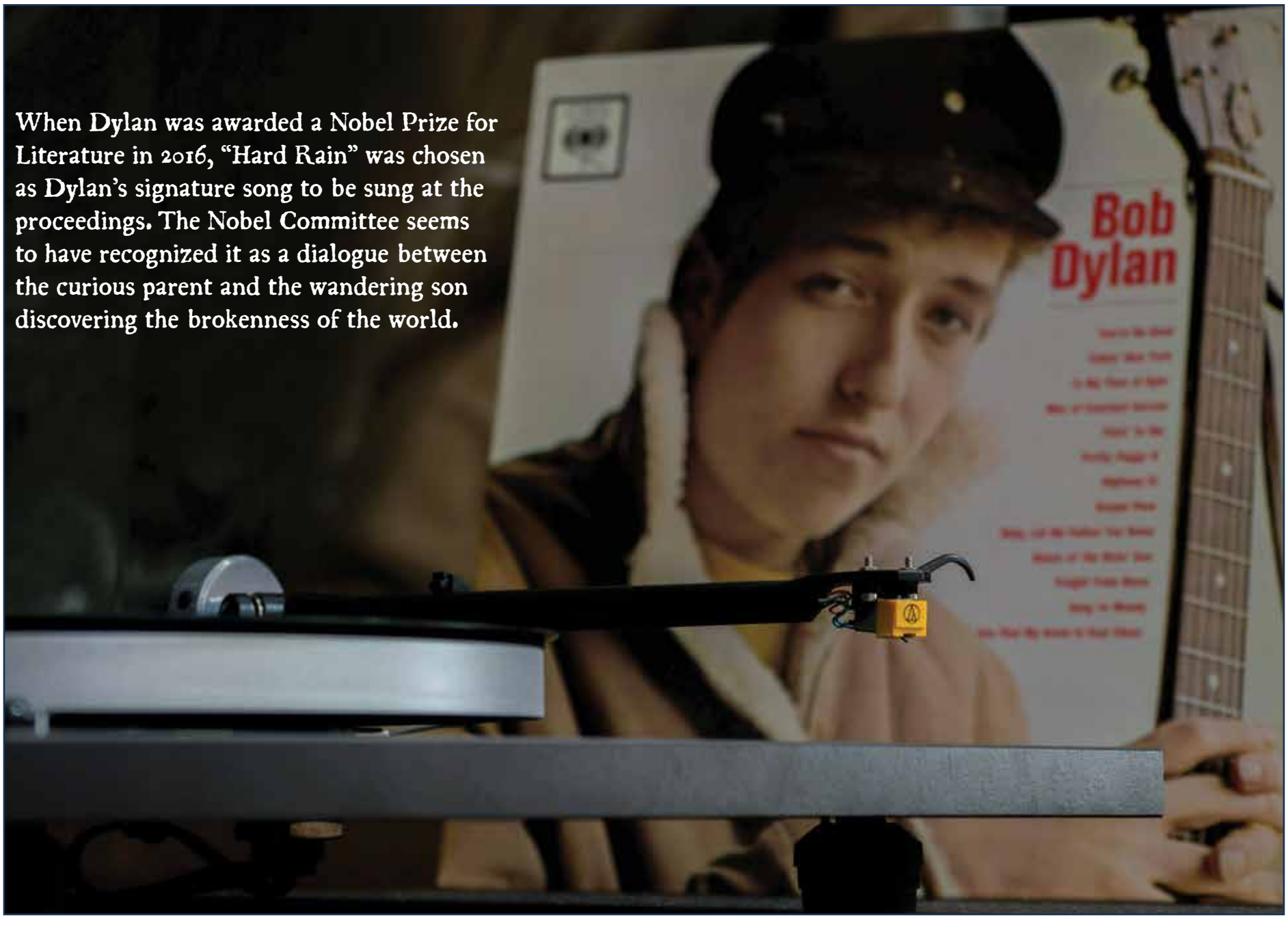
> "You're so alone. Then a piece of shrapnel hits the side of your head and you're dead. You've been ruled out, crossed out. You've been exterminated. I put this book down and closed it up. I never wanted to read another war novel again, and I never did."

He adds: "You've come to despise that older generation that sent you into this madness, into this torture chamber." In this poetic lecture one sees the roots of Dylan's "Masters of War":

> "You that never done nothin'
> But build to destroy
> You play with my world
> Like it's your little toy"

I can imagine a film postscript scene with a seventy-five-year-old Dylan expressing in a talking blues the horror of the protagonist of *All Quiet* catching shrapnel in his brain in a rat-infested trench as WWI ended. The scene had haunted him since high school in Hibbing, Minnesota.

In *A Complete Unknown* Joan Baez hears Dylan singing this song in the downstairs club Gaslight, grabs him on his way out in the stairwell and they passionately kiss. It is October 1962, the day of the Cuban Missile Crisis. She has left her apartment to escape, but nuclear war allows nowhere safe to go. They return to his apartment, make love, and he is up early writing "Blowin' in the Wind." This sequence is a fictional account of how Dylan and Baez began their affair. But it enacts a truth about the zeitgeist of 1962. The Boomer generation will remember being instructed to "duck and cover" under their desks in grade school in the event of nuclear war. Baez and Dylan here enact an erotic version of duck and cover in the face of a Cold War "Hard Rain" falling. A last chance for love making in the face of annihilation.



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A Complete Unknown continued...

Philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950. He declared, like Oppenheimer, that the advent of atomic weapons meant that any wars must be avoided since they threaten the extinction of mankind. Russell read whodunnits instead of great literature to deal with his fear of nuclear annihilation. He claimed that in whodunnits characters jump in and out of bed with alacrity. Even at ninety Russell used sex, or the imagination of it, as an opiate to still the anxious zeitgeist of the nuclear age.

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The Representation of Race

Bruce Langhorne played guitar on many of Dylan's albums, including *Bringing It All Back Home*, and on his famous Newport electric performance in 1965. He sometimes played a Turkish drum he purchased in Greenwich Village, with bells added on the inside. When asked to play it in a session by a producer, he became the inspiration for Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man." Dylan said of Langhorne that, "If you had Bruce playing with you, that's all you need to do just about anything." Born in Harlem, he and Odetta sang "Oh Freedom" at the 1963 March on Washington before Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I have a dream" speech. He died in 2010. He is played in *A Complete Unknown* by Malick Koby, an Abijan-born singer-songwriter.

Brownie McGhee is the blues musician who appears in Pete Seeger's television show with Dylan. He and Dylan played and wrote songs together in the early Greenwich Village days. He is played by Joshua Henry who played Aaron Burr in the Los Angeles production of *Hamilton*. In the film, McGhee offers his guitar to Dylan, wanting him to play some blues. Dylan resists taking his guitar, saying that it would be like borrowing Brownie's woman. But Brownie insists, with the proviso that Dylan does not squeeze her too tightly. Dylan launches into his 1965 blues "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry."

The scene encapsulates Dylan's complex relationship to the civil rights movement. As shown in the film, he plays "Only a Pawn in Their Game," about the assassination of Medgar Evers, at the 1963 March on Washington. Not shown is the controversy over whether Dylan and Baez were putting themselves out in front of the movement or simply supporting it. Will Kaufman writes that as a result of this dispute, "Dylan had become highly circumspect over whether and where he would choose to perform the blues." Since the origin of the blues is in the historic pain of African Americans, he would be stealing his authenticity instead of acting out of spiritual love. He would be squeezing the blues too tightly. This problem is expressed in the title of Dylan's 2001 album '*Love and* Theft,' whose quotation marks indicate that it is taken from Eric Lott's book about the history of minstrelsy in America. To avoid stealing black authenticity, Dylan's songs about race do not depend on a bluesy performance to do their cultural work. Some are biographies of blacks who have suffered racial injustice like Medgar Evers, Hattie Carroll, Emmett Till, or Hurricane Carter. Dylan's persona in performing these songs is that of a white witness playing the role of historian or reporter. He has said that he believes in the cause of civil rights, but he also believes in "distance." Singing the blues risks stealing the black voice, ventriloquizing the black narrative in a kind of minstrelsy.

"Blowin' in the Wind" is not a blues nor a biography of racial injustice. But it is both antiwar and antiracist. "How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?" seems to be a reference to the three-fifths of a person status of slaves in the antebellum constitution. It inspired singer-songwriter Sam Cooke to write his civil rights anthem "A Change is Gonna Come." Folksingers like Dylan "may not sound as good, but people believe them more." "Blowin' in the Wind" asks a series of questions about change, "A Change is Gonna Come" declares that change *is* coming.

Dylan's 1965 "Ballad of a Thin Man" reverses the subject-object, white-black, gaze of minstrelsy. Mr. Jones is a white gaze. An educated square who knows that "something is happening here," but he doesn't know what it is. In one verse Mr. Jones purchases a ticket to watch a geek, a caged carnival performer who

The mural in Minneapolis, Minnesota portraying Bob Dylan from young troubadour to Nobel laureate by street artist Eduardo Kobra.

bites off the head of a chicken or snake and is usually black. It is a grotesque form of minstrelsy:

> "You hand in your ticket and you go watch the geek/
> Who immediately walks up to you when he hears you speak/
> And says, 'How does it feel to be such a freak'/And you say, 'Impossible!' as he hands you a bone/
> And something is happening here and you don't know what it is/
> Do you, Mr. Jones?"

Mr. Jones' mask of conformity is removed by a geek, who asks him how it feels to be a freak. If Mr. Jones pays to see a geek, he should examine what a freak that makes him, despite his feeling that that's impossible. He's unhip, out of time with what's going on, even with himself. The black voice of the geek, the black gaze, informs him that he, too, is a witness, despite his perceived degraded state. He offers Mr. Jones a bone as a token of their equality in this regard. His gesture of offering the bone subverts his perceived inferiority, asserting his equality as a witness. In Todd Haynes 2007 film *I'm Not There*, Cate Blanchett as Dylan offers Mr. Jones a microphone through the bars for a comment from the inside of the geek's cage. The microphone symbolically transforms the black gaze into the song's interrogation of Mr. Jones: "How does it feel to be such a freak."

The scene encapsulates Dylan's complex relationship to the civil rights movement. As shown in the film, he plays "Only a Pawn in Their Game," about the assassination of Medgar Evers, at the 1963 March on Washington. Not shown is the controversy over whether Dylan and Baez were putting themselves out in front of the movement or simply supporting it.

Although puzzling to many folks, Black Panther Bobby Seale knew what was happening here. He writes in *Seize the Time*:

> "Huey P. Newton made me recognize the lyrics. What the lyrics meant in the history of racism that has perpetuated itself in this world. Maybe we can get a hell of a lot more out of brother Bobby, because old Bobby, he did a good job on that set."

In *A Complete Unknown* a young black woman named Becka accompanies Dylan to a party. When they leave together, Dylan complains that fame brings a heavy load of expectations. As he walks away from her, Becka asks Dylan if she is a heavy load and says that she loves him. He says that she hardly knows him. Becka is played by Laura Kariuki. She is a fabrication, representing no particular person in Dylan's story. Yet, during this period, Dylan was smitten by the gospel and blues singer Mavis Staples. According to Gayle Wald they had a several-year-long courtship leading to a marriage proposal by Dylan which she turned down. Perhaps she didn't want to marry a white man during the civil rights movement. But they remained life-long friends. This occurred while Dylan was dating Suze Rotolo and burgeoning his career playing duets with Joan Baez. Although Mavis Staples is mentioned five times in Elijah Wald's *Dylan Goes Electric*, the inspiration for the film, there is no mention of the romance between Mavis and Dylan. On the back side of the typescript for Dylan's 1965 *Subterranean Homesick Blues* are lines for his never-recorded song. "Mavis:"

1. "down in Chicago town there lives a queen
   She sings the blues if you know what I mean
   Ah Mavis
2. I dream she's singing in my sleep but worse
   I wake up thinking I'm in church
3. she sings the blues in a long white robe"

Dylan had been attracted by the creative and sonic authority of black gospel chanteuses at least as early as 1958 listening to *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues*. He was struck by her operatic voice and percussive guitar playing. She is mentioned in *A Complete Unknown* on a list of folk performers in a planning meeting of the Newport Folk Festival committee. But in the onstage swirl following Dylan's exit after going electric, I think I briefly spotted a woman who looked like her, but she is not listed in the credits. Odetta has the distinction of being the first artist to release an album of Dylan songs, *Odetta Sings Dylan*, in 1965, which I still own.

Greil Marcus writes that he came to understand Dylan's conversion to Christianity as a rediscovery of himself: "Bob Dylan had been offered the kingdom of being recognized as himself, as someone he had all but forgotten."

Dan Desena

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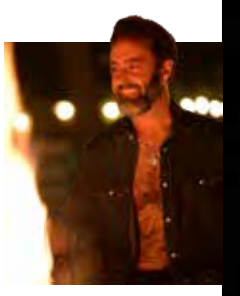

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A Complete Unknown continued...

Dylan composed and performed his gospel catalogue from 1979-1981, accompanied by so-called "backup" singers, including Carolyn Dennis, who he would eventually marry and have his child. Howard Sounes writes, "The birth was one of the most closely guarded secrets of Bob's career."

According to Will Kaufman, Dylan "never fell into the trap of many other white performers of black music—attempting to be black, at least in voice." This is not completely true. Timothy Hampton writes that during his Christian period of songwriting when Dylan uses what linguists refer to as African American Vernacular English in several of his gospel songs: "So, "I Believe in You," from 1979 gives us "Cause I don't be like they'd like me to" (instead of the more standard, "I won't be"), and "when white turn to black" (instead of "turns"); "Saving Grace" gives us "the death of life, then come the resurrection;" "Slow Train" says "it cost more to store the food than it do to give it,' and so on."

Unlike Dylan's avoidance of ventriloquizing the black blues voice, in gospel Dylan is willing to use Black English. Timothy Hampton sees the shift in language as signaling Dylan's perceived victimhood, as "an allegory for his marginalization as a Christian rock star." So, on the blues side the love versus theft dialectic, Dylan avoids theft; on the gospel side, his love turns into theft. When Dylan moved from acoustic folk music to electric rock at Newport, he and his band were booed. When Dylan moved from rock to gospel, he and his backup singers were booed. Paradoxically, his bluesy gospel compositions did not feel like gospel to a black audience, many of whom, like Pops Staples, regarded his "Blowin' in the Wind" as authentic gospel. Although Dylan's Christian period ended with "Infidels" in the early eighties, he won a grammy for his gospel-inflected "You Gotta Serve Somebody" in the late eighties, with a reappearance of black backup singers.

Bob Dylan and Jay Gatsby have quintessentially American stories of self-invention. Both travel from the Midwest to New York City, and both change their names and make up stories about their past.

Greil Marcus writes that he came to understand Dylan's conversion to Christianity as a rediscovery of himself: "Bob Dylan had been offered the kingdom of being recognized as himself, as someone he had all but forgotten." Sean Wilentz writes derisively of his relationships with his black "backup singers:" "Dylan . . . performed with his own soulful black maidens, who were also, at various times, his lovers. In the American South, the lines between one kind of show and the other—Holy Rollers and hoochie-coochie—had always been blurry; indeed, one sometimes followed the other on the same night."

Dylan scholarship tends to minimize the agency of these black women singers and musicians. His so-called backup singers, who included Clydie King (formerly with Ray Charles) and his new wife Carolyn Dennis, writes Gayle Wald, "Not only supported him sonically in this era through their arresting vocal arrangements and skillful percussive accompaniment, but also pushed him to be a better—that is, more spirit-infused—singer."

In *A Complete Unknown*, the Becka character is an illegible cipher rendering opaque the story of Dylan's relationships with black women, both musically and romantically.

Dylan and The Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby is often called the great American novel. Young people read it in school, often once and never again. Many have seen a film inspired by it. They are struck by the romance and twenties' glamour. On the track "Summer Days" from Dylan's 2001 album *'Love and Theft,'* Dylan adopts Gatsby as a philosophical self: old, rich, partying late into the night. He puts the novel's Gatsby in conversation with his.

Bob Dylan and Jay Gatsby have quintessentially American stories of self-invention. Both travel from the Midwest to New York City, and both change their names and make up stories about their past. They become wealthy and are celebrated by the glitterati. The city represents modernity and its challenges. Fitzgerald's novel, published in 1925, puts new technology at its center—the automobile, both physically and symbolically. The technological counterpart is Dylan going electric at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965. In the novel, the rich are careless drivers and careless people. Gatsby dies because rich Tom Buchanan ruthlessly lies about who was driving Gatsby's big yellow car when it struck his mistress on the road. Electricity only got Dylan booed. But his going electric at Newport was symbolically a quantum leap in modern popular culture.

Until Dylan, popular songs were entertainment. He turned them into literature. Dylan's Gatsby has a dance partner who says, "You can't repeat the past." He replies: "Can't repeat the past? Well of course you can." This is essentially Gatsby's exchange with his friend Nick in the novel. Years have past since Gatsby's brief romance with Daisy in Louisville. She's now married to Tom Buchanan. Nick warns, "'I wouldn't expect too much of her. You can't repeat the past.' 'Can't repeat the past?' Gatsby cries incredulously? Of course you can.'" *The Great Gatsby* itself has gone electric since its publication in 1925. Its meaning has changed with the times. The latest film iteration is director Baz Luhrmann's 2013 version. Discussions of racist replacement theory are in the novel, and they flourish in the Trump era. Tom Buchanan had read only one book, *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* and spreads its message. In the film we can hear the music that the novel can only mention on the page. Daisy Buchanan grew up in Jim Crow Louisville, where black blues was filtered out by a racist culture.

> "For Daisy was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year, summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes. All night the saxophone wailed the hopeless comment of the 'Beale Street Blues' while a hundred pairs of golden and silver slippers shuffled the shining dust."

Black blues cannot be heard because it is drowned out by orchestras playing the latest dance music for white debutante parties.

Gatsby's parties are similarly an artificial world of cheerful snobbery and orchestras. In the novel the music is described as "yellow cocktail music" of white privilege, with no black blues. Gatsby doesn't want to advertise his otherness to Daisy, a Southern belle he hopes will walk in one night. In Luhrmann's 2013 film, black music occurs in the city, as in the speakeasy scene, in which Jay-Z's "$100 Bill" plays on the soundtrack. Hip-hop here substitutes for the blues in representing the Black experience. In the lyrics Jay-Z, like Dylan on "Summer Days," becomes a Gatsby-like character rapping, "History don't repeat itself, it rhymes...."

The inability to grieve the past is a source of the rage of the present moment; a politics of grief must replace the politics of grievance.

Tom and Daisy don't show up at Gatsby's funeral. Speaking to his dead body, his friend Nick promises Gatsby that he will be remembered. He goes back to the Midwest and writes Gatsby's story. The novel is a delayed eulogy. Nick's story is a lonely act of witness. Without it, he thinks, Gatsby's story will be lost forever in a web of lies and gossip. Without the ability to mourn our past, be it Gatsby's story or America's, it will disappear. And so might Nick's eulogy itself eventually slip away into America's endemic amnesia. If the story's mutilation principle is carelessness, its corrective principle is mourning. Dylan becomes a white witness of black oppression in the post-World War II period. He gives us words and music that allow us to mourn our original historical sin. Grief testifies to the importance of one's love and caring for others. Unlike Fitzgerald's novel, his performances bring moral urgency to care through action.

Dylan resembles Walt Whitman on democracy and grief. Martha Nussbaum writes of Whitman's expression of the nation's grief over the death of Lincoln. "The poet gives his dead president a portrait of the nation from the point of view of a citizen of this transformed democracy, a place of truly free and equal individuals, where all, capable of mourning, can let go of hate and disgust, and pursue a truly inclusive love.... The recognition of mortality has as its natural corollary a redoubled attention to our duties in the world." The inability to grieve the past is a source of the rage of the present moment; a politics of grief must replace the politics of grievance.

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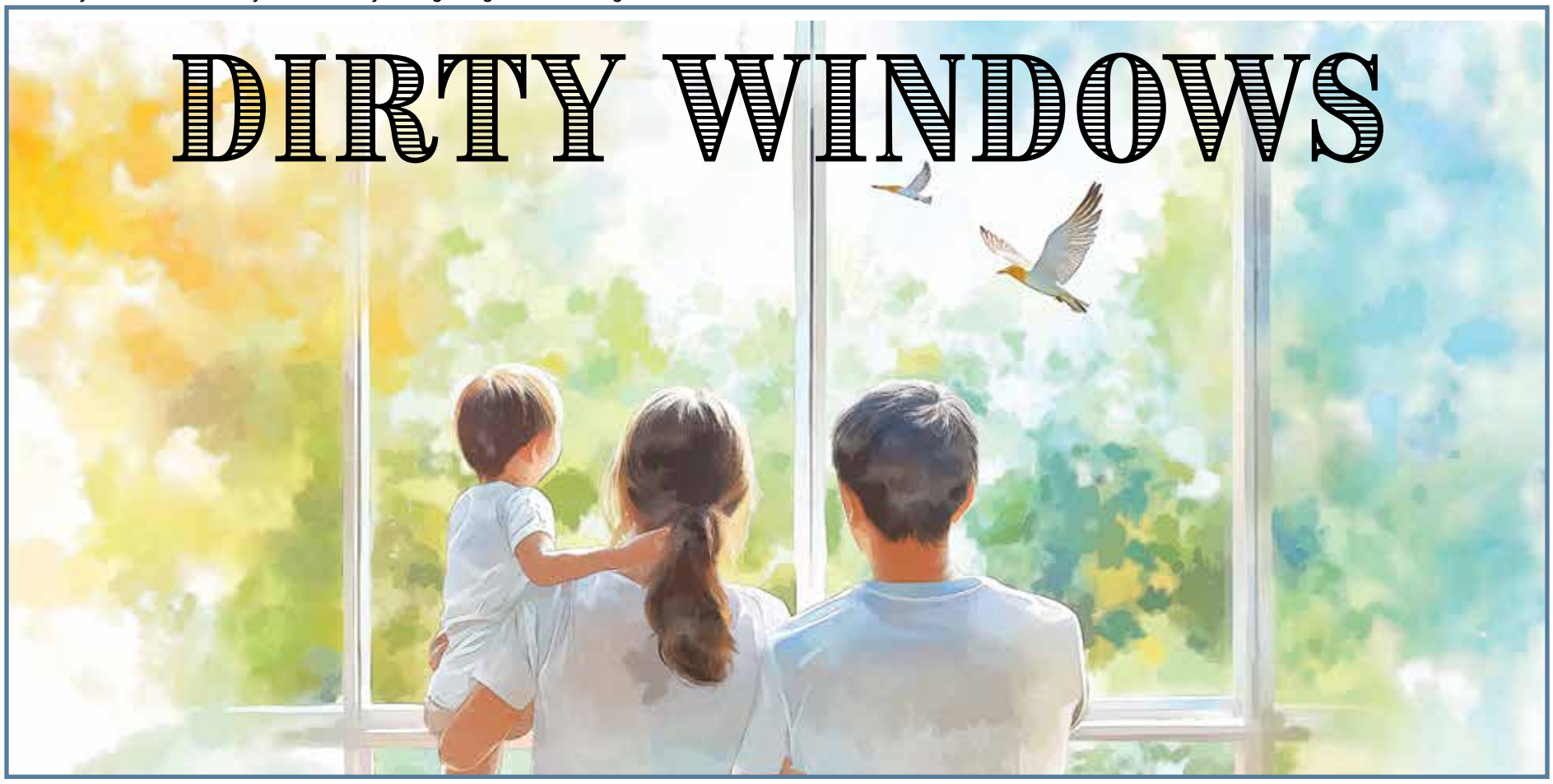

By Frank Vandervort

"The reason for acting compassionately is to manifest your highest hopes for the world, regardless of the odds that the world will be transformed."
Scott Russell Sanders, *The Way of Imagination*

The birds are exuberant this morning. By the dozens, tufted titmice, rose-breasted grosbeaks, cardinals, gold finches, black capped chickadees, blue jays, mourning doves, and an oriole sing and flit from branch to nearby branch in a riotous clamor just outside the living room windows. One of the delights of spring is the way one can luxuriate in the bookends of the day. Morning unfolds slowly as the light gathers until the sun crests the horizon, and then all at once the day bursts open like a flower. Evening lingers before the day finishes. It is at these times that I especially enjoy watching the birds come and go.

The birds gathered, jockeying and fighting for position, to gobble the sunflower and saffron seeds. Unfortunately, birds fleeing from the feeder when more aggressive species showed up began to crash into the windows.

We live in a house built in 1958, in a mid-century modern style. We love it. It has large windows in every direction that "bring the outside in" as the architecture magazines would write. They allow natural light to flood every room and offer expansive views of the yard which is adorned with maple, white pine, oak, and paper birch trees. Robins bounce around on the ground plucking worms from beneath the duff while squirrels and chipmunks scurry about on their daily routines. A family of rabbits has made a home under the cedar that grows near the corner of the cantilevered deck. Some mornings, as I sit sipping coffee, I watch them nibble on the clover that grows in the side yard.

When we first moved here more than twenty years ago, we quickly attached bird feeders and a bath to the deck just outside the largest bank of windows. The birds gathered, jockeying and fighting for position, to gobble the sunflower and saffron seeds. Unfortunately, birds fleeing from the feeder when more aggressive species showed up began to crash into the windows.

The sound of a bird crashing into one of the windows, often hard enough to rattle it in its pane, is recognizable and, while not routine, is also not rare. At any given time, there are likely to be several blobs or splotches on the glass where birds have flown into one or another of the windows. After these collisions, tiny feathers often cling to the glass. As I write this, the outline of the entire underside of a bird (I don't know what species) is discernable on one of the panes—its breast, tail and wings are easily traceable like the negative of a photograph.

In his classic essay, "The Land Ethic," the naturalist-writer Aldo Leopold explains that the ethical land steward must expand "the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals." Reflecting on this, I came to see that, in our case, this notion of "bringing the outside in" can be a form of avarice. We want to live protected from the wind and rain and snow, with all the modern conveniences, heating and cooling systems, plush carpeting and comfortable couches, yet we want to feel as if we are living *amid* the trees and flowers and birds. "[A] land ethic," Leopold writes," changes the role of *Homo Sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members and also respect for the community." The same windows that allow us to watch the cacophony of backyard wildlife also present a real hazard to the songbirds. By putting feeders and a bath near those windows, we exacerbated that hazard. We needed to be better members of the community. We removed the feeders, but the crashes continue, although less frequently.

This morning, sunlight pours through the northeast facing windows revealing them to be smudged and wearing a thick coat of raindrop-streaked dust. They are filthy! My impulse is to put down my book, grab a bottle of window cleaner, some paper towels, and go to work. Then, I stop myself.

One day recently, I was working in my office on the opposite side of the house when I heard the familiar sound. I came out to find a small bird lying on the deck beneath the window. I went out and hunkered down next to it. I could see that it was still breathing. I looked closely at its iridescent blue-green and black feathers. Tentatively, I touched its twig-like leg. I assumed that it would die. As I watched, it began to move just a bit. Then its eyes blinked a couple times. As carefully as I could, I ran my finger over the crown of its head, lightly touching its feathers. The bird sprang up and flew to a branch of a nearby cedar. Perched there, it shook its head several times looking punch drunk like a boxer who'd taken a heavy right hook to the jaw. Eventually, it flew off. I was relieved. I shouldn't have been. According to research conducted by the American Bird Conservancy, 60% of birds that initially survive window collisions will ultimately die from the injuries they suffer. So, the chances are that it succumbed to its injuries.

As carefully as I could, I ran my finger over the crown of its head, lightly touching its feathers. The bird sprang up and flew to a branch of a nearby cedar. Perched there, it shook its head several times looking punch drunk like a boxer who'd taken a heavy right hook to the jaw.

Only a few days after that bird's unsteady escape, another slammed into one of the dining room windows—the collision so loud I heard it two rooms away. I stepped outside to find a house wren lying on the sidewalk. It was obviously dead, lying on its back, its feet up in the air with its head turned to the right, precarious and twisted, its obsidian pebble eyes wide open.

Birds fly into glass, the Conservancy reports, because they are unable to "understand the concept of glass as an invisible barrier that can also be a mirror." Rather, they perceive the reflections of the sky and the trees they see in windows as a continuation of the space they currently occupy. As a result of that inability to distinguish the reflective capacities of glass, the Conservancy estimates that 360-980 million birds are killed each year by colliding with it, whether residential windows like ours or the sides of glass office towers and apartment buildings. In a single night in early October 2023, nearly 1000 birds died after crashing into McCormick Place, the steel and glass convention center on Chicago's lakefront. Since 1970, such crashes are a leading cause of the overall reduction of North America's bird population.

Writing in the journal *Science* in 2019, a team of researchers from some of our [country's] leading avian study centers estimated that one in four birds that "span diverse ecological and taxonomic groups" have been lost in the past five decades, an overall population reduction of some three billion. Nearly 60% of species have seen a decline. Even more troubling, 70 species have lost two-thirds of their population, and the Conservancy estimates that without critical changes, bird populations may be reduced by another 50% over the next half-century.

Online sources we consulted suggested several ways to reduce the number of bird-glass collisions. Following some advice, we attached decals to the windows, but that didn't work. The collisions continued. Then I read that birds are more likely to fly into clean windows than dirty ones because dirty windows are less reflective. It has helped. It's been years now since we've cleaned our windows thoroughly.

A few weeks later, when the fall migration was complete and winter was approaching, I gave the windows a light cleaning, wiping away the worst of the accumulated dirt. I hoped that by the time the spring migration rolled around they would accumulate enough dust and dirt to prevent most crashes.

Still, one day last October—the time of year when the windows are their dirtiest—we had just returned from shopping and were putting away groceries when there was an especially loud crash against one of the living room windows. I stepped out onto the deck to find a yellow-bellied sap sucker laying on its back, its wings folded around its pale-yellow undercarriage, leaking blood from its beak and eyes. My heart sank. As with the others, I gathered it up and carried it into the yard where I placed it on the ground beneath a clump of wilting golden rod.

A few weeks later, when the fall migration was complete and winter was approaching, I gave the windows a light cleaning, wiping away the worst of the accumulated dirt. I hoped that by the time the spring migration rolled around they would accumulate enough dust and dirt to prevent most crashes.

One lovely mid-morning early this spring, I returned from running to find a small bird lying on the deck, motionless. Its torso was a vibrant cobalt blue, its wings and square-tipped tail mostly black. Its gray beak was closed tight, claws curled as if clinging onto a branch. I pulled my Peterson's Field Guide from the shelf and determined that it was a male indigo bunting, a member of the finch family, and a beautiful little bird.

There is a growing movement to encourage or mandate through building codes some kinds of solutions to help our bird friends avoid colliding with the windows in our houses, but there are a number of things homeowners can do now to prevent window crashes:

- There are a host of window coverings on the market typically in the form of curtains, thin films, or adhesive dots that can help to prevent crashes.
- Some have found windsocks or pinwheels useful.
- Curtains and blinds can be helpful.
- When building or remodeling, using bird-friendly design (e.g., specialized glass) is effective.

When a thousand birds can die in a single night from crashing into a single building, when perhaps a billion die this way each year, it can seem futile to make the effort. But it is what I can do, and given the ravages of the Anthropocene, I feel a moral obligation to do what I can. That is what it means to be a conscientious member of the community. So, for now, I'll sit back and enjoy the morning, read my book, and hope the dirty windows prevent any birds from crashing. Come November, maybe I'll give them a wipe.

Frank Vandervort is a writer, lawyer, and law professor. He enjoys being in and writing about the outdoors. His writing has appeared in Michigan History Magazine, The Boardman Review, and Bridge Michigan among other outlets. He lives in Ypsilanti Township, and rarely cleans his house windows.

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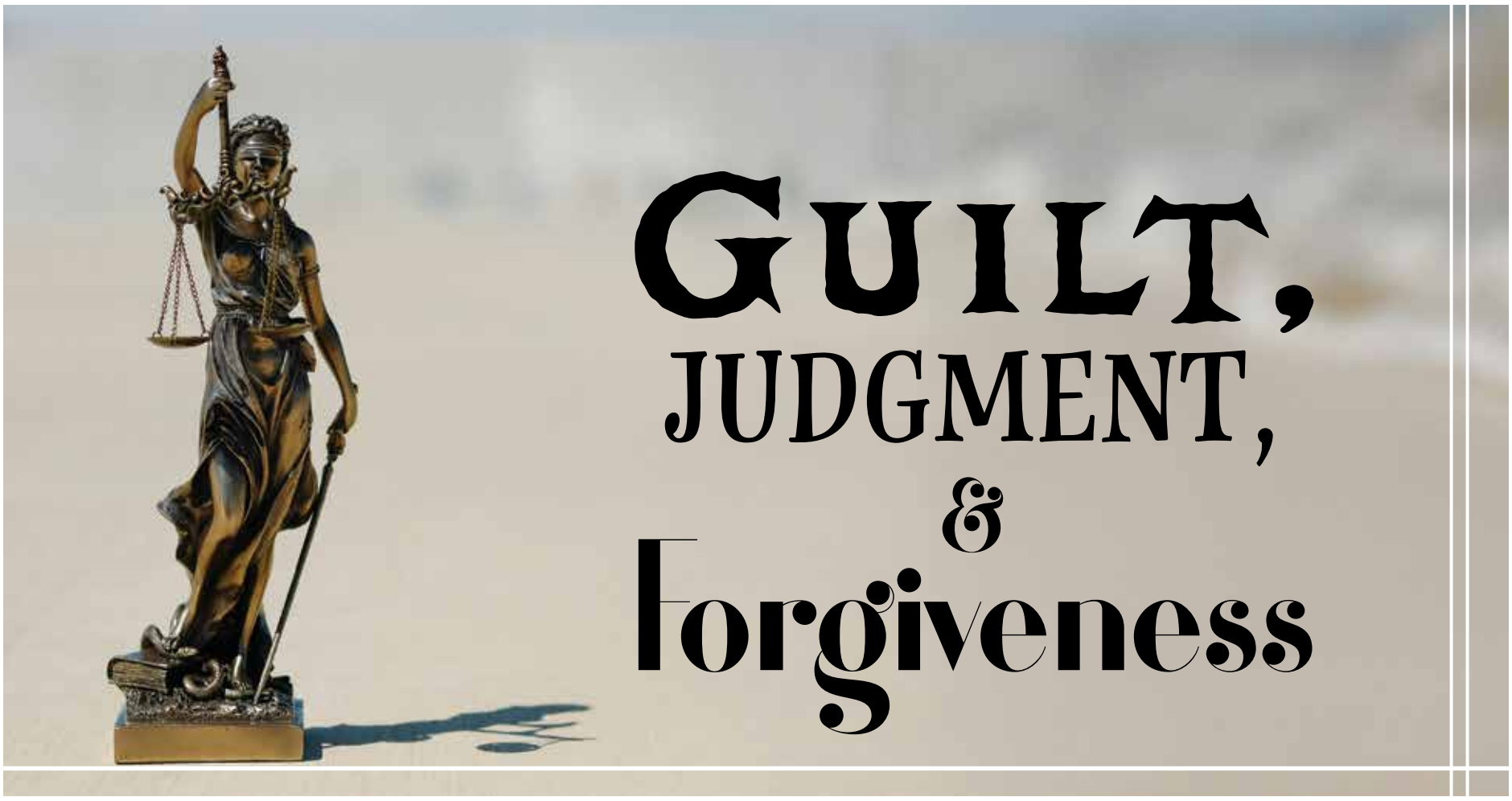

Guilt, Judgment, & Forgiveness

By Sandor Slomovits

Earlier this year an obituary in *The New York Times* caught my eye. It was of Clint Hill, who died in February at the age of 93. Hill was the Secret Service agent who, on November 22, 1963, immediately after President Kennedy was shot, jumped on the back of the presidential limousine and shielded the President and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy with his body as the motorcade sped from Dealey Plaza to nearby Parkland Memorial Hospital.

For much of the rest of his life Hill repeatedly said that he felt profound regret and guilt about not saving the president, about not getting there in time to take the fatal third shot himself. He once said, "I will carry that to my grave." Although he continued to serve in the Secret Service for more than a decade after that day, first protecting Mrs. Kennedy, and then Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford, and Richard Nixon, and eventually becoming Assistant Director of the Secret Service, he retired at age 43, haunted by deep depression and recurring memories of that heartbreaking event.

FOR MUCH OF THE REST OF HIS LIFE HILL REPEATEDLY SAID THAT HE FELT PROFOUND REGRET AND GUILT ABOUT NOT SAVING THE PRESIDENT, ABOUT NOT GETTING THERE IN TIME TO TAKE THE FATAL THIRD SHOT HIMSELF.

A few days after reading Hill's obituary, I came across a *New York Times* profile of Ivy Schamis, who was a teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School when, on February 14, 2018, a gunman killed 17 students and staff there, including two in her classroom. After the gunman shot into her classroom, he moved on to another room and Schamis, not knowing if he'd be back, prepared her response if he did. She planned to look him in the eye and say, "We love you!" perhaps hoping against hope that the declaration would deter him from killing again. Like Agent Hill, Ms. Schamis, seven years after that horrific day, still feels regret and guilt. "I didn't save them," she said of her slain students.

After the shootings, Schamis returned to her teaching, feeling an obligation to help until all the students who'd been in her class that day graduated from high school. Then she quit and moved away but has continued to stay in touch with many of her former students and is still a source of support for them to this day.

MOST OF US WILL PROBABLY NEVER FACE SIMILAR TRIALS BY FIRE, AND IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO STAND IN JUDGMENT OF ANYONE WHO HAS.

The famous Zapruder film of President Kennedy's assassination shows that Mr. Hill reacted within two seconds of the first shot, and in reality, had absolutely no chance to save the president Similarly, Ms. Schamis had no realistic possibility of stopping the gunman who was armed with an AR-15 rifle. Yet both Hill and Schamis still felt responsible for the deaths on their watch.

There are also, sadly, examples of tragedies that might have been prevented had people acted differently.

The former Broward County sheriff deputy on duty at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on the day of the shooting, was blamed by many for not entering the building and trying to stop the gunman. Indicted on child neglect and ten other related charges, he was tried in 2023 and acquitted on all charges, but his civil trial is still pending.

In another case, the police in Uvalde, Texas faced widespread condemnation for waiting well over an hour before engaging and ultimately killing the gunman responsible for that sickening attack. Two of the 376 police officers who responded that day have been charged with criminal negligence and child endangerment and are awaiting trial later this year.

Most of us will probably never face similar trials by fire, and it is not my place to stand in judgment of anyone who has. In the course of human history, legal systems have evolved—fallible and imperfect though they may be—to hand down those verdicts. I have no way of knowing how I might have responded in any of those life and death situations.

I can only ask myself, "Have I faced my own trials—comparatively tame though they have been—with courage or cowardice? Am I meeting my current challenges bravely or timidly? Will I be ready when the next test presents itself? As Hamlet says, "The readiness is all…"

AND WHEN WE FAIL, AS MOST OF US WILL AT TIMES—WHETHER BECAUSE WE FACE AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK, OR BECAUSE WE ARE TESTED IN A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS, WE CAN HOPE THAT OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS—AND PERHAPS MOST OF ALL, WE—WILL FIND THE STRENGTH TO FORGIVE—EACH OTHER AND OURSELVES.

Above all, always, I hope not to be found wanting.

And when we fail, as most of us will at times—whether because we face an impossible task, or because we are tested in a moment of weakness, we can hope that our fellow human beings—and perhaps most of all, we—will find the strength to forgive—each other and ourselves.

Sandor Slomovits is one of the two brothers in the Ann Arbor folk music duo, Gemini. Visit then at GeminiChildrensMusic.com. In addition to the CWJ, he also writes for The Ann Arbor Observer, The Washtenaw Jewish News and a number of other local and national papers and magazines. His essays and other writings are at SandorSlomovits.com.

Ch-ch-ch-Changes (with Apologies to David Bowie)

All that you touch, You Change.
All that you Change, Changes you.
The only lasting truth Is Change.
God, Is Change.

— Earthseed Chronicles, Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

By Kirsten Mowrey

I read *Parable of the Sower* for the first time in my twenties—it was an adventure tale then. But now, I see Octavia Butler's story of a young woman who negotiates loss and a journey toward a new life actually holds a tremendous amount of wisdom for negotiating life changes: to ride with change rather than resist it, to respond to change by bringing forth more of our gifts and wisdoms, rather than our fears and evasions.

For we are, indeed, in a time of change. While we are always changing—our cells replacing themselves, our children growing up, passing of beloved pets, places, homes and people—collectively we are entering new terrain. Our Earth, our only known home, the only known biosphere where humanity exists, crossed the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold in February 2024. We live now in the warmest temperatures in pre-industrial recorded human history, in a world of new experiences, new dangers, and new uncertainties.

While we are always changing—our cells replacing themselves, our children growing up, passing of beloved pets, places, homes and people—collectively we are entering new terrain.

Knowing our human animal nature, our body, its rhythms, capacities, strengths, weaknesses, hidden trapdoors and secret passages, is the work of a lifetime. It is the journey of bone-knowing our essence, of the gifts we came to the world with and all the beliefs, values, filters that our culture has inculcated in us. But it is not our only purpose: our work is also to become human beings, integrating our bodies with our minds, hearts, and souls for the sake of community. All faith, all prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, group practice are designed to aid us in this journey, to give us a community to return to where our wisdom, gifts and souls are expressed.

Humans are biologically wired for social connection. Our autonomic nervous system has two branches: sympathetic and parasympathetic. Recent science discovered further branching of the parasympathetic system into two branches: ventral vagal and dorsal vagal.

When we get frightened, we move down the ladder evolutionarily, to an older part of the brain, one we share with multiple species. This step downward takes us to the sympathetic nervous system, what Deb Dana calls "mobilization."

At the top of the ladder, when in ventral vagal states, we can calm ourselves with our breath. We feel empathy for others. We play games. We are social. We can witness a friend's pain and respond to them, or comfort a crying child, or help our wounded pet. We can access all the capacities we have worked hard to develop and use our skills—yoga, prayer, reaching out—to help ourselves in pain or change or whatever our circumstances demand.

When we get frightened, we move down the ladder evolutionarily, to an older part of the brain, one we share with multiple species. This step downward takes us to the sympathetic nervous system, what Deb Dana calls "mobilization." Depending on our internal perception, we could find the energy for that last mile in the marathon, or we could run away from a wild animal. The context informs our response. In extreme distress, we move further down to the ladder to dorsal vagal, or "immobilization." We may stop connecting with other people and draw inward.

Covid isolation taught many of us that being with people is essential to our well-being. Biology reinforces this. We are primates and all along our family tree, our kin live in community. Our closest relatives, chimpanzees, live in troops, as do gibbons, howler monkeys, and baboons. Even orangutans are now classified as only "semi-solitary." Yet many of us have lost the skills of living in community, primarily because most of us were raised in less than evolutionarily optimal conditions. In *The Evolved Nest*, psychologist Darcia Narvaez and ecological psychologist G.A. Bradshaw document the optimal conditions for human beings such as sharing care, touch, breastfeeding, free play, and moral commitment. In the absence of these communal conditions, we become more vulnerable and exposed, more likely to move down the evolutionary ladder into distressing sympathetic and dorsal vagal states.

We can choose to turn toward more optimal conditions for ourselves. I observe this every time I host a community ritual. Community means we come together as a "sudden village" where we are invested in one another, in re-building, for a brief time, the village mindset that all our ancestors nested within. We create an energetic container to hold one another in relationship to our impetus for gathering—be it grief or gratitude or movement. We create the container with our intention, becoming attentive, generous, and kind with one another, sharing with respect and care. Even if we have been fearful and alone before the ritual, I am always amazed at how kindness, respect, and sufficiency of time warms even the shyest, most remote, most fearful soul.

Many of us have lost the skills of living in community, primarily because most of us were raised in less than evolutionarily optimal conditions.

At a recent grief ritual, in our first hour, I urged the community to pause in sharing their grief and feel in their bodies the change in the room. The warmth, attention, and care in the circle was palpable, and I saw shoulders soften in real time as people allowed themselves to feel that moment in their bodies. Being in community encourages us toward co-regulation, toward ventral vagal states. In groups, we create a bigger energetic container than just our solo consciousness—one that holds possibilities for change. Our awareness and bodies just need the presence of others to have space to stretch out, to return to the way humans lived for 100,000 years before industrialization took hold, and we fractured into smaller units. As we tend to one another in our sudden village, our ability to access our human fullness becomes more robust. We become more porous to the world through group song, poetry, and movement, more able to live with the complexities and paradoxes of life.

Ritual is an ancient human technology—an activity engaging our bodies, minds, and souls simultaneously. Ritual is part of our human inheritance. We know its rhythms and power in our bones, though we may not have experienced it in our lifetimes. Ritual can move us into a spacious sense of life. I have been in community rituals singing, moving for hours, and am always astonished at how relaxed and enlivened I feel afterward, finding the time not exhausting, but calming and regulating. Living this way leads to a slower, centering pace. The first time I encountered true ritual, I felt I had come home to soul in a way I had never experienced before in my life. That feeling is potent and evocative.

Choosing to step away from society's isolating strictures, to remove ourselves from the mechanized pace of modern living, to be vulnerable together in ritual and community, to identify and nourish our human beingness, is to create what Margaret J. Wheatley calls, "an Island of Sanity" in the world. Within the bigger container of community, using a particular quality of attention and intention, we can sometimes—and with practice more frequently—choose differently how our bodies move up and down the biological ladder when experiencing change. We have faith practices, communal practices, personal practices, skills and relationships to support us in moving to where we want to be in our animal bodies to express our humanity.

Yes, we have crossed permanent thresholds: personally, communally, planetary. We have taken the wrong street, the detour, the bad decisions of the past, transgressions of great pain and wounding. And yet, "the world offers itself to you" each day, as Mary Oliver said, each morning a new beginning, each moment an invitation to draw closer to our hearts and souls, longings and dreams. Viktor Frankl, after surviving four concentration camps in World War 2, wrote "the final freedom that can never be taken from us is to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." From the limitations of our mortality and skillfulness, I invite us to live our fullness, in relationship with each other, and make different decisions.

Kirsten Mowrey holds community rituals periodically and works with individuals privately. Find her at kirstenmowrey.com.

By Irena Nagler

...I more than once, at Noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone—

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me—
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality—

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone—

-Emily Dickinson, from 986 *A narrow Fellow in the Grass* 1866, 1891

In winter, they brumate. A word that suggests mist and fog: *"La brume,"* pale smoke twisting and wending, shedding tendrils and opening portals. The etymology is successive. From French, mist and fog; from Old French, winter; this derived from *bruma,* Latin for the Winter Solstice.

Before shedding a skin, as they do a few times a year, snakes turn to fog: a bluish cast to the skin, eyes cloudy opals. Then the skin is rubbed off on a tree or rock and discarded on the ground like a fallen leaf.

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Brumation, as distinguished from hibernation, is a metabolic slowing. Snakes don't hibernate in winter, but they sleep for long periods, waking to forage, sometimes galvanized into more activity by periods of warming, then quiescent again when the weather cools.

In the spring, when water is loosed from ice and rainclouds and the air warms, they quicken and emerge in search of mates and the best locations for birthing, and that is when humans most often encounter them. The female snake leaves a scent trail; the males follow. Mating involves entwining tails. Both live births and eggs are possible in various species.

On April 8, 2024, the day of a total solar eclipse, I arrived at Leslie Science Center, having decided not to join the road traffic en route to the umbra. Paper eclipse glasses in hand, I wandered into Black Pond Woods and decided to stay there. The leaves were only barely emerging, and I could see the sun perfectly well between the nearly bare crowns of trees. At the pond, sporadic frog calls thrust out, sudden and almost fierce. A hawk flew over it and away into the woods, where I heard it laughing periodically for the next hour.

As the sun was gradually swallowed, shadows darkened and seemed to accrue a weight of added dimensions. There was a subtle shift to a fairytale ambience, a sense of theater, of anticipation and opening portals. The frog chorus mellowed and expanded into a mesh, with higher peeps rising like starbursts, typical of evening. The pond and the woods were steeped in twilight magic. A long tree-shadow was laid out directly from under my feet like a road to another realm.

Darker, and the frogs went silent.

Suddenly there was a rustling of brown leaves near me. A squirrel? Nope. At the culmination of the eclipse, a long gray snake, gleaming in the sliver of remaining sunlight, shot up from under the leaf-cover. It slid away toward a fallen log, and under it, then emerging on the other side, made its way on the hunt deeper into the woods.

The sun returned so gradually that I couldn't see the difference in the sky, but the light was changing subtly, a brightening gold, and the frogs began to call again. I left the woods to rejoin the humans.

A few days later, I used my imagination to dream as the snake. It took me wandering inside Earth, down mineral chutes, through caverns sculpted by underground water, lured by a whisper of fire. It touched everything and everything shined. It polished all facets with a liquid love.

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Apophis, the snake god of the Egyptian pantheon, swallows the sun every night, and also by day during eclipses. Ra, the embodiment of the sun, always triumphs, navigating the underworld in his boat by night, fighting Apophis to win through the shadow of diurnal eclipse.

The asteroid considered most likely to collide with Earth has been named Apophis, echoing a terror of darkness and unknowing in a world no longer home.

Snakes can paralyze humans with fear. There's a freezing "zero at the bone"—a recognition of something unnervingly primal and universal in our own evolutionary past, and in some of our internal organs, too: brain convolutions, intestines, movement of blood through veins, undulations of muscle. There is the knowledge that some snakes use venom to protect themselves and stun their prey and others kill by strangulating.

The fear is instinctive. The first time I saw a snake on a back porch at home, I was four years old. The twitching, gliding thing looked like a severed and animated tail. I fled.

There's a statue in the St. Thomas cemetery on Sunset Road. I happened on it during a walk on the paths that snake their way up and down the sloping ground among old oak trees, the woods of the bluffs beyond. On subsequent visits it was a tossup whether or not I'd find the statue again, as if it sometimes existed in this world and other times not. It's a beautifully carved Marian figure, her eyes serene. When you look down at the feet, you see she's stepping on an equally exquisite snake; she's vanquishing the Edenic serpent.

Lilith, Adam's legendary first wife, is sometimes associated with snakes, even identified with the serpent who tempted Eve, having disguised herself after her banishment from Eden. In contemporary myth resurrecting a Goddess or multiple goddesses, she becomes a force encouraging the shedding of restrictive social/mental skins and reclamation of power and passion. St. Patrick's Day, March 17, is recast as "All Snakes Day" to affirm a paganism based in oneness with the living system, welcoming snakes into the circle.

Serpents are strong presences in most, if not all mythic and religious systems. They have androgynous symbolism, echoing the fluid nature of human sexuality, gender, and consciousness. Much of what's contended about currently is cultural, not biological. But when a culture (as most cultures do) has adopted restrictive beliefs based on misunderstanding of what I call the bodysoul, which has its own powers, and allowed only certain traits, relationships, or activities based on XX or XY origin, serpents sometimes embody what's hated or feared. In Western culture that has meant a fear of the female, of women. Mary, in contrast to Lilith, embodies the "pure" woman who rises above an imagined and feared dark welter of female power.

In some Christian communities, notably in the American South, a tradition of snake-handling expresses this dynamic in a visceral manner. Both men and women gather to sing and shout themselves into an entranced and open state, then take up handfuls of venomous snakes, seen as Devil incarnate. The capacity to handle them and even to survive snakebite is felt as a gift from God and a sign of salvation. The ecstasy, even from the delirium of snakebite, is transcendent, even when springing from a dualistic mindset; the worshipers' consciousness spills over into a unity of flow described as melting, a deliquescent merge.

In many other cultures, snakes are respected and celebrated and a certain amount of healthy fear acknowledged. In India, the feast of Nag Panchami honors snakes on the fifth day of the July/August moon cycle. Human chakra systems—adapted to creatures distinguished by an upright stance, with an up/down orientation—are characterized as a serpent asleep at the base of the spine, a fire-coil that ideally matures to rise and culminate in a cobra-head flare above the crown of the head.

From age seven to nine, I lived in Ibadan, Nigeria, where my father was teaching at a technical college. Wariness of serpents was ingrained in everyone: black mamba, green mamba, cobras. A long, lime-green, sleeping snake was draped on our stair landing one afternoon. And there was the performing snake charmer with a clutch of cobras. (I don't know if that is legal now.)

One afternoon at a neighborhood birthday party, a lot of little girls were sent on a scavenger hunt. One item on it was "a letter in another language," i.e. other than the English spoken in this former British colony. I knew my mother would have lots of those, so I raced eagerly to our driveway and hurtled down its slope. I vaguely noticed a crowd of adults gathered at the house, and heard them yelling at me, but my focus was entirely on the scavenger hunt. I ran and leaped and skipped and skidded to a halt at the house. "Mama, I need a letter in another language!"

"Turn around," she said. "Turn around and look."

I did, almost into the slitted eyes of a rearing cobra, one not yet treated with the customary drug or antidote to be administered from a little envelope by the man standing behind it, who was looking rather...pale.

"You jumped right over the snake," I was told.

Marian statue in the St. Thomas cemetery.

Two years later, my favorite word having become "prissy," and with a best friend who scorned all that was girly, I decided that I would no longer be prissy about snakes. I would learn to like them. I'd swoop on a little garter snake in the woods and pick it up. No fun for the snake, I imagine, though it didn't struggle, just hung over my hand in an arc with a curious head weaving and eyes like jewels. Its face smiled a little, its skin was dry, and its body slender and supple. It worked. I began to love them. And boys were nice to me when I caught snakes and frogs which was a warming experience given the derision that often greeted my ineptitude at ballgame sports.

A crystal bowl concert upstairs at Crazy Wisdom. The audience is warned to be careful while driving afterward. The singing stones emanate a rock-solid tone that cuts through swarms of cells. I feel a reptile in my spine rearing up and peering over my head with ancient eyes: the bones of a mountain washed in a primordial sea.

Human embryos reveal a reptile phase in ancestry. Embryos have some reptilian muscles; a few are born with remnants of these, considered birth defects. Mammals descend from a branch of the synapsids, and they in turn from an ancient reptile, a common ancestor to all mammals, reptiles and birds, represented most clearly at this time by fossil evidence of an ancient, bearded dragon found in Australia, but largely still a mystery.

It may not be so strange, given the ancestry of birds, that some mythic serpents are winged, like the Egyptian Wadjet cobra who became a royal symbol worn as a crown, or Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec feathered serpent, one of several Mesoamerican winged-snake gods associated with the sky, wind and rain, creator gods. Quetzalcoatl generates art and the quest for learning, and like the Christian Jesus is expected to return after a time apart from human life.

Good dancing with snakes involves awareness that the serpent has a life of its own and cannot be forced to move in any way. If anything, they are teachers and are treated as partners.

Tracy Moore, Curtis Glatter, and I created a dance piece in 2011 based on a story by Helen Slomovits. It described a dream she'd had of a Delphic oracle cave with a pair of snakes: "The Cave of Healing Dreams." Two snakes twining around a staff are a familiar symbol of healing and medicine. Curtis improvised shimmering and percussive music. Tracy was the dreamer. I had to be as still as a sleeping snake for at least twenty minutes, a serpent wound around a pillar. Then in a shockingly sudden move, as snake motion often is, I uncurled and joined Tracy. She and I danced as the two snakes. The Dreamer then awoke healed and ran out into the sun. I'm still working a bit on ironing out the results of twenty-plus minutes of contorted stillness in that dance. A little too much "all for art" there. I neither regret nor recommend it!

In ancient Greece, snakes were physically present at the Delphic oracle on a mountain considered the center of the Earth. It's been found recently that there really is a rift there that probably sent up hydrocarbon gases breathed by the Pythia priestess to induce oracular trance. The Delphic nexus embodies the transition from female-centered, Earth-based religion to a time when Apollo has vanquished the snake and taken command of the oracle. Still, it was a woman who descended into a lower chamber to receive messages from Gaea, the Earth.

The Appalachian Mountains were once connected to a range in Scotland and Wales. Serpentine stone is a strong presence in this long chain of interrupted vertebrae. It's green, the color of human eyes that are considered an indicator of fairly near-past ancestry that's unusually "mixed." We can tune in to the slow motion of earth tectonics by dancing and entering imaginatively into the serpentine formations of rock. We can feel our bones as extensions of it.

Snakes are exquisitely sensitive to vibration, taste, and smell. They can perceive both ultraviolet light and infrared thermal radiation. As "cold-blooded" creatures, they need to bask in sun-warmth.They have expandable jaws, enabling them to swallow larger prey. They have no limbs nor moveable eyelids, no voice except the capacity to hiss, and no ear openings; their sense of sound vibration is internal, connected to the jawbone. Their forked tongues taste and smell continually. A Jacobson's organ in the tongue gives chemical cues of perception. One-tenth of all snake species are venomous; these will tend to have a triangular or spade-shaped head.

In the heads of some rare legendary serpents resides a mythical jewel, the *nagamani,* that gives immunity and healing to snakebite. Known as a snake stone, black stone, or cobra pearl, the *nagamani i*s administered in the form of a black bone in healing ritual that calls on powers of belief.

The story of the jewel evokes the sense of a fierce directional sense as if the snake made a decision, pierced its way into the chosen path with its head, adjusting direction as necessary, and the coils then just follow. Snakes can spend an enormous percentage of their lifetimes asleep or deeply still, then suddenly whip into motion. Not a bad way to proceed: to be profoundly still, sensing currents both inner and outer, then act the moment it's time to do so.

When they move, it's more as if motion runs through them. Not unlike some sea creatures, or the slow unfolding of plant life growing and opening, their morphology reflects mammalian inner bodies. It's a mystery to themselves only partly illuminated by x-rays and ultrasound, apprehended more by feeling than seeing. Dancers, especially belly dancers, may at least subconsciously tune into it when refining their art.

Dancing with snakes is not an element of original Middle Eastern dance. American belly dancers adopted it beginning in 1960, when, according to a story, a dancer rescued a snake from a box at a fair and wound up dancing with it wrapped around her. Good dancing with snakes involves awareness that

SERPENTINE

the serpent has a life of its own and cannot be forced to move in any way. If anything, they are teachers and are treated as partners.

A dancer named Asia, who lived for a few years in southeast Michigan, performed in Espresso Royale on Main Street with a boa constrictor (named Lucille). Kalaea, who co-directed a dance theater group with me, had organized the eclectic event, and she and I performed in it, too. Afterward, I retreated to a designated changing room. Asia's husband was there, with Lucille huddled around his neck. "Would you like to try holding her?" he asked me and another dancer who replied with a firm "NO."

I said, "Sure, okay", and Lucille was transferred to my shoulders, pouring herself in a long shawl. Instead of curling up again, she remained open and swayed slightly. Her scales each moved with a life of their own, multiple strands of living coins and sequins laid flat against each other in chains, and through them flowed the motion of layers of muscles, all slung on one long liquid one that united them. The mantle of her weight was a sea that leaned on me and breathed down one fold of snake and up another. It was also like a shifting of tectonic plates—not agitated—an unhurried movement, sensitive perhaps to the energy of recent dancing still astir. I found out later that, at least according to one author, she was pretty comfortable with me.

The snakes, or our perceptions of them, can take us beyond what's humanly bearable. But we can become like them at some moments curled in sunlight, at peace on a warming stone, allowing the world to move through us: flexible and fluid enough to be safe in the best of ways.

Dream: I have Medusa snakes for hair. They have a metallic sheen and hum a little almost beneath audible sound. I'm playing a piano. The snakes don't touch the keyboard, but they're like nerves. They guide in bringing forth nuances of sound and music.

For a few Halloweens after that, I wore a Medusa headdress made from a green, snake-patterned hair band with dangling snakes. Medusa was a Gorgon in an ancient Greek myth familiar to most in Western culture. In some variants of the legend, she was a beautiful woman transformed by an angry goddess to one with snakes for hair, whose fearsome appearance petrified any whose eyes met hers. Like Lilith, she's been reclaimed by modern feminists and witches, a symbol of liberating anger and a potent beauty that defeats attempts to cast it in a measurable mold.

Dream: In a building within a parking garage. It's a combination of carport, prison, and job application center. I need to come up with a persona, a new name to preserve soul energy while working here. I can't quite grasp the name while asleep but wake up saying "Melusine." Later, in waking life, I find a reference to Melusine as a name to take for protection in a situation where one must conceal a witch identity.

Melusine is a European spirit of fresh water in wells or rivers, a serpent or fish from the waist down. Sometimes she has two tails, or wings, or both. In most legends, the best-known being from France, she is married to a king who is forbidden to see her while bathing. When he breaks his promise to abide by the injunction, she becomes a permanent snake or dragon, perceived as monstrous.

Memory, almost a dream: I'm a small child, maybe three. My family has a log cabin in the big woods spanning mid-Michigan. Across the dirt road is a spruce wood with its knees in swamp water, and a little lake or the bend of a river. Men are fishing there. One of them tall and elegant in black, with a black hat, and long black muck boots dangling in the water. A black water-snake swims by with its head raised high. They are all united in my memory: dark water, dark trees, tall man, and especially those boots partly immersed, and the black snake... seeming extensions of one coil in a subterranean river.

The University of Michigan is now the owner of 70,000 snakes and some salamander specimens, inherited from researchers at Oregon State University who had UM connections. The snakes, received in 2023, are coiled tightly on themselves in alcohol-filled jars. The majority are garter snakes and water snakes.

Our river is especially serpentine in its course through Ann Arbor. Most rivers have convoluted areas, especially where they wind around hills, as the Huron does here. I live in a district where one can walk in any direction and soon reach the river. In Island Park, there's an annual gathering called River and Dream. Dancers and audience participate in a movement meditation in the water. As best we can, we pour ourselves out of mental containers and shed constricting skins to join with the current coiling around our legs, rushing between fingers of hands dipped in it, flocks of birds or bats flying overhead as if all on one muscle and trajectory. Moving with and resisting the current, splashing drops like glimmering scales and sending them skyward and mischievously toward each other and the audience.

Among the many Australian aboriginal groups are variants of a Rainbow Serpent legend, possibly somewhat distorted by anthropological reports as if there were only one story. It tends to be a creator god, like the Mesoamerican one, associated with water and blood, a giver of life and occasionally vindictive in anger. It's androgynous: male in some tribal cultures, female in others, and may have a double body. Some commentators associate it with ideas of a multiverse of infinite possibility, many worlds branching from each choice in any moment, whether obviously weighty or infinitesimal and barely noted: infinite rivers to an eternal sea.

From where you stand or sit, imagine a slow serpentine coil of fire or water inside the Earth. Allow a muscular tendril of it to enter you through your feet and begin to move as it directs you. Slowly erase with it any tension that binds you to what is not yours. Follow the trajectories chosen by the snake and expressed through its mythical jeweled head (you can let one or both of your hands be the head.) Flow in your essence and allow the firewater-snake to encompass all of you, until, moving out from your solar plexus center, you are reaching, stretching, contracting again and reaching again. You may find that you can perceive and touch with inner senses even what is quite far away or reach into alternate versions of the world.

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's long poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* a wedding guest is detained by an old, emaciated sailor with glittering eyes who is compelled to tell his story of a haunted voyage into an icebound sea. The ship had been guided by a sublime albatross, a Christian icon, with power to melt channels in the ice, calm the sea, and call forth auspicious winds. The sailor slays it with a crossbow, after which it's slung around his neck. His fifty shipmates perish, leaving him alone in agony and drought on a fiery sea trodden by strange reptiles. But watching them, the intensity of his anguish draws him into a transcendent state, as though shrugging off a worn-out skin.

Beyond the shadows of the ship,
I watched the water snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glowing green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware…

- From Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 1798

Beauty is an ocean that we keep trying to fit into a measuring cup. Love is a fathomless spring. Dance freely in the rhythms of the snake and it moves through the coils.

Beauty is an ocean that we keep trying to fit into a measuring cup. Love is a fathomless spring. Dance freely in the rhythms of the snake and it moves through the coils.

The Mariner's ordeal brings him realization in a fever dream that transforms his terror into a sea of love. He's Christian; it's not unlike the trances of the snake-handlers, but his vision transcends the fear of "Devil snakes" and bathes them in a love that might be fearsome to those unready for it. The Mariner himself becomes frightening and compelling, and the wedding guest must listen to him.

The snakes, or our perceptions of them, can take us beyond what's humanly bearable. But we can become like them at some moments curled in sunlight, at peace on a warming stone, allowing the world to move through us: flexible and fluid enough to be safe in the best of ways.

And gradually or with shocking suddenness awaken to seas of love.

###

YOGA COLUMN

Namaste, Katie...

Whether you're a seasoned yogi or getting ready to roll out your mat for the first time, here you'll find a variety of useful tips from local yoga instructor, Katie Hoener.

Namaste Katie,

Like many readers and practitioners my meditation practice has been all over the place this new year. I am feeling disconnected and even trying to sit still for a few minutes is a challenge. My mind is overwhelmed with everything all around. Any recommendations?

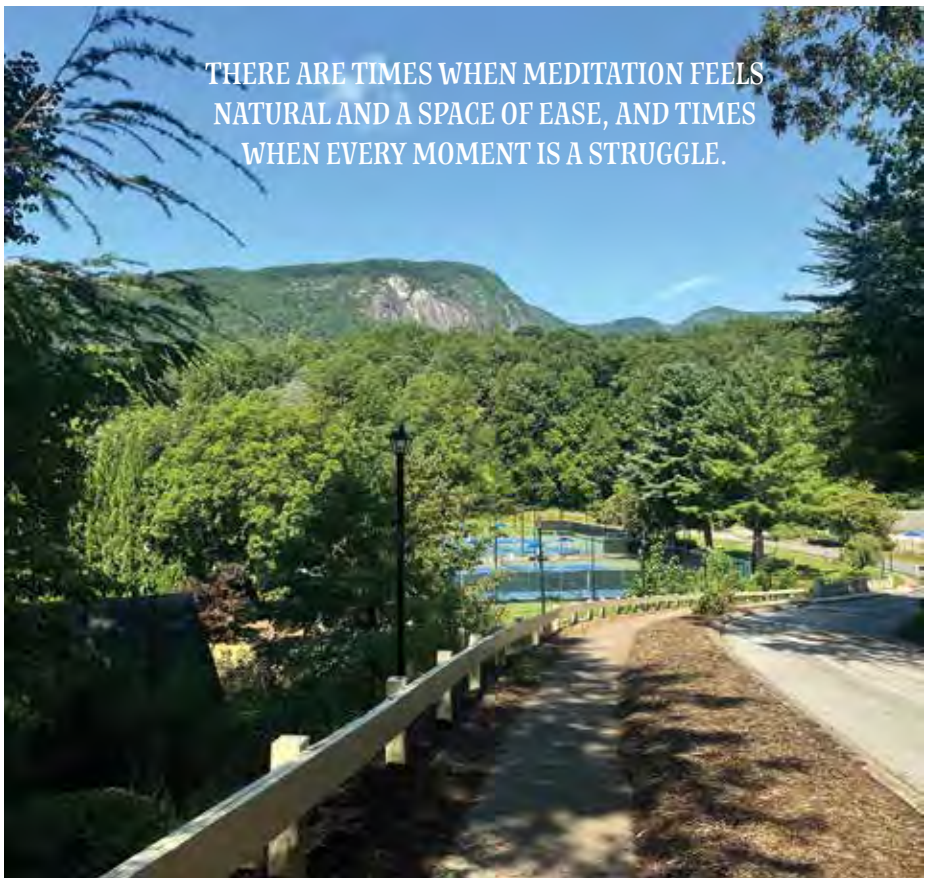
Elyse, Ann Arbor

Dear Elyse,

One thing that we continue to remind ourselves, and that you elicit so beautifully in your question here, is that this is a *practice*. There are times when meditation feels natural and a space of ease, and times when every moment is a struggle. We ask ourselves to practice, to give ourselves grace, and even look to a practice that offers a little more care and compassion.

One meditation that we rely on at the Yoga House is a refuge meditation. It asks that you pull into your mind a place, a person, or an ideal that you hold as a comfort, or in high esteem. Something that feels like home and that has little negative thoughts associated with it.

Some prompts associated with a refuge meditation are: *I find refuge in __. I feel safe when surrounded by ___. I am at ease with ___*. We may wish to write down answers to all the prompts or have one prompt in mind when we sit down for our meditation. Allow as much of the images or feeling tone to develop as feels good to you during the time you have dedicated to your practice. Pictured here is one of my refuge places, the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina, that I call up for many practices.



Namaste Katie,

This winter has felt so constricting, huddled up, and indoors. I take most of my yoga classes online, which is a gift, and yet, chilly! I am hoping to add, or modify a pose that will feel more expansive, and open up the body.

Billy, Ann Arbor

Dear Billy,

I can fully relate to this sensation–the shrinking in, and the tension held in the muscles of the body that leads us to feel smaller and tighter. Yoga classes at home are so wonderful for access, and at times we do need to create a little heat in our practice for a variety of reasons.

One posture that I find has the opportunity to create heat and extension is a Reverse Warrior Posture. We come into this pose from a Warrior II. We can setup the distance between the feet in a way that feels comfortable and safe. From here on an exhale, we allow the back arm, the one near the straight leg,

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to relax down toward that back leg. The front hand reaches toward the sky. We have the opportunity to reach the top arm further behind, as long as that feels comfortable, laterally bending the spine. We may also want to stick with the extension overhead.

Within a reverse warrior there are many options to explore. We may want to change the position of the gaze and explore the movements of the neck. If we find any pinching or pain, remind yourself to back out. We have the opportunity to flow in this space, which can create a little more heat in the posture. An inhale moves us into the Warrior II, and an exhale into the Reverse Warrior. As always, if the hold is giving the expansiveness that meets our needs, we can hold there and settle into the breath.

Namaste Katie,

My therapist recently told me to add breathing practices to my day. In yoga class, the practices that we do are a little noisy, or uses our arms, and I am not quite sure that I want to do those at work! Any that I can do throughout the day?

Hayley, Ypsilanti

Dear Hayley,

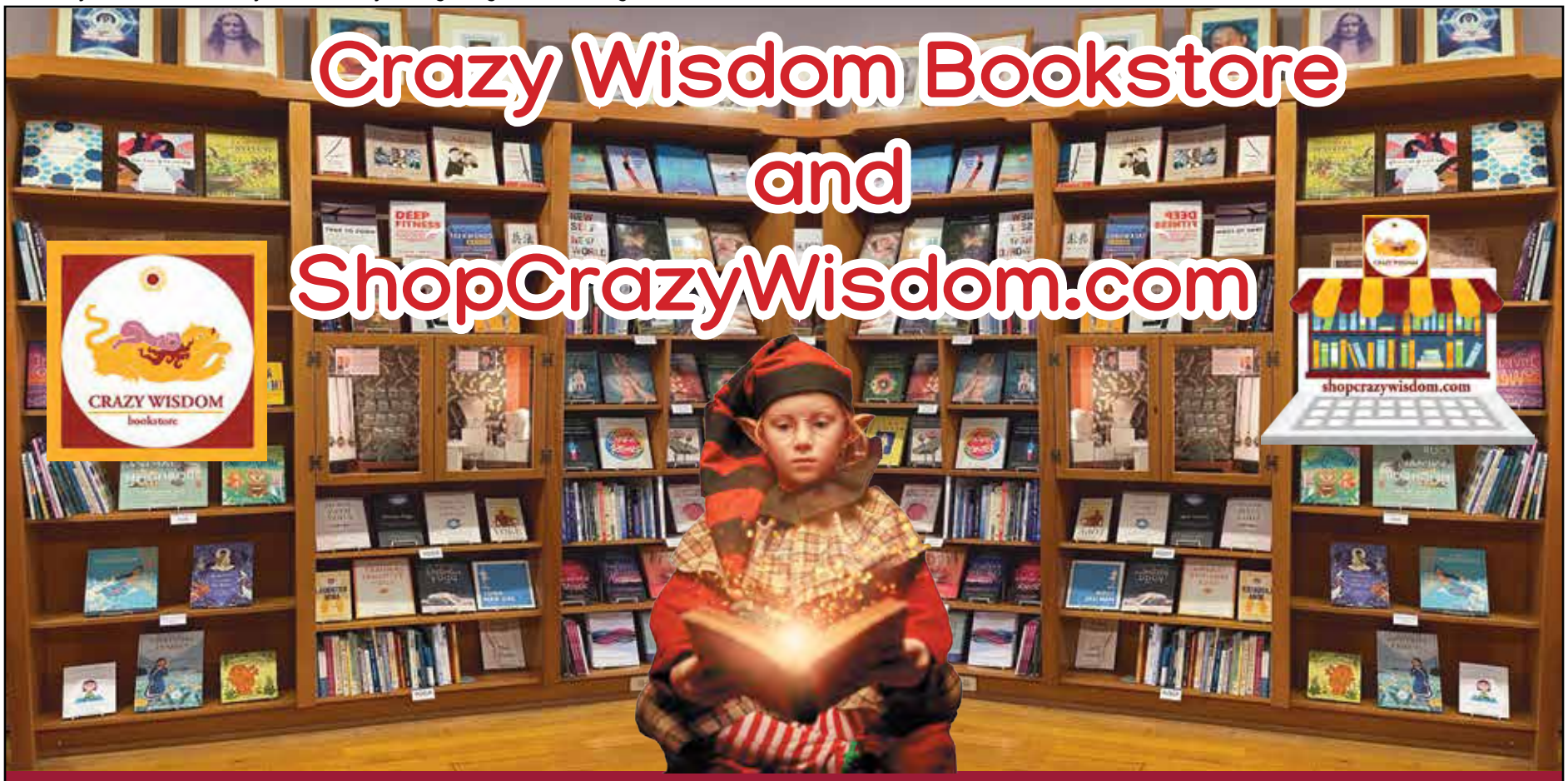
Yes, indeed! I love that recommendation. Breath practices are incredibly grounding and help all of us to manage stress and anxiety. Having those that restrict the throat and create a bit of noise is one way to draw focus in multiple ways, but it is not the only way.

One way discussed in nearly every yoga text, is the practice of diaphragmatic breathing. In this practice we are actively drawing the diaphragm down toward the pelvic floor, creating space for the lungs to expand. We often experience this sensation as the abdomen expands as we fill the lungs with air. It can be a challenge when we first start to engage the diaphragm and draw it deeper into the body, to allow the lower abdomen to shift, creating space higher in the body for the expansion of the lungs.

One practice that you can do, in the office, or the yoga studio, is to allow one hand to rest on the lower abdomen and feel the rise and fall of the abdomen as you play with the breath. Notice the breath in its resting state and then start to expand the breath. If you are in a place of tension, a meeting perhaps, allow the hand to rest there, as you draw the breath deeper into the body. Take a few of these deep breaths as you track the movement of the breath and the body.

photograph by Heather Nash Photography

Katie Hoener is a RYT 500, receiving her 200 and 500 hour trainings. She is also a Licensed Master Social Worker and a partner at Verapose Yoga in Dexter (veraposeyoga.com). Please send your own yoga questions to katie@veraposeyoga.com.



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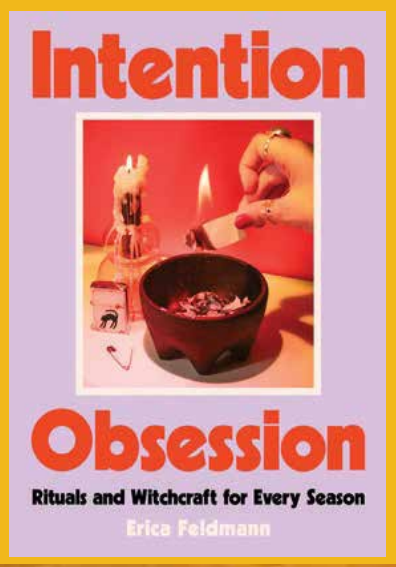

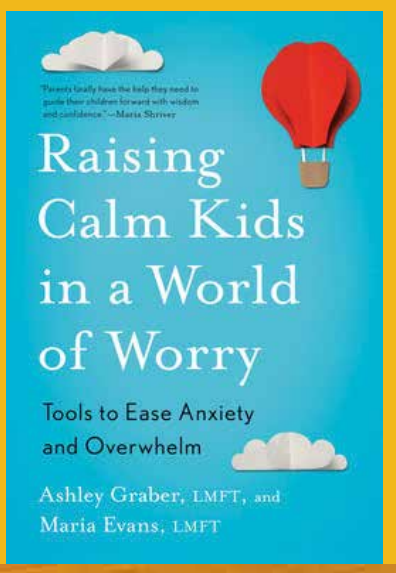

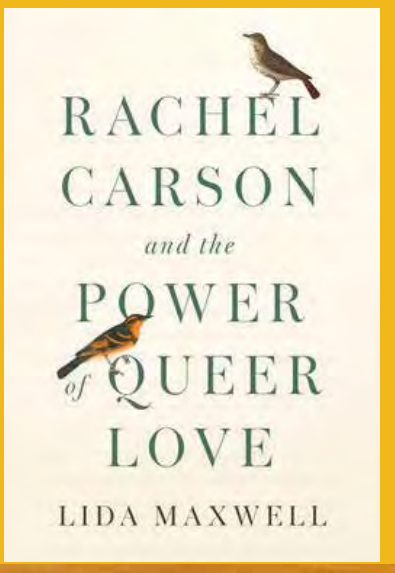

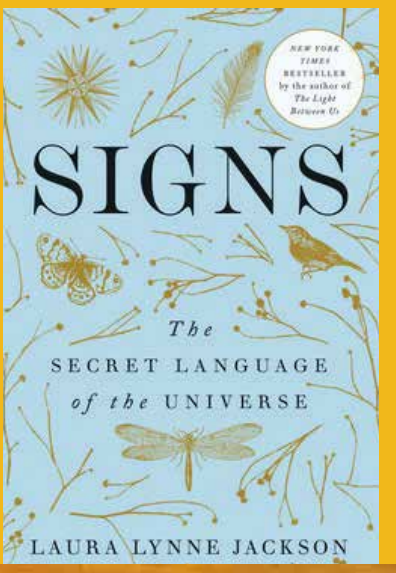

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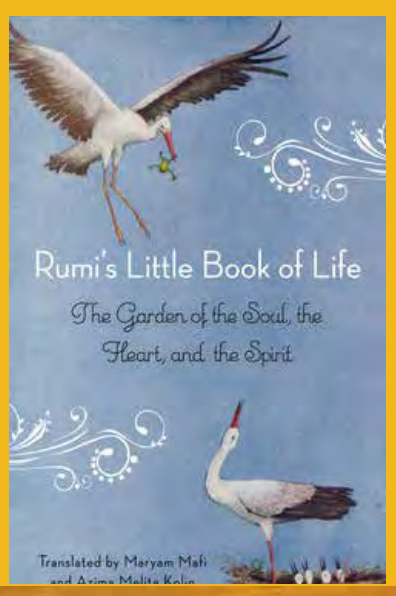
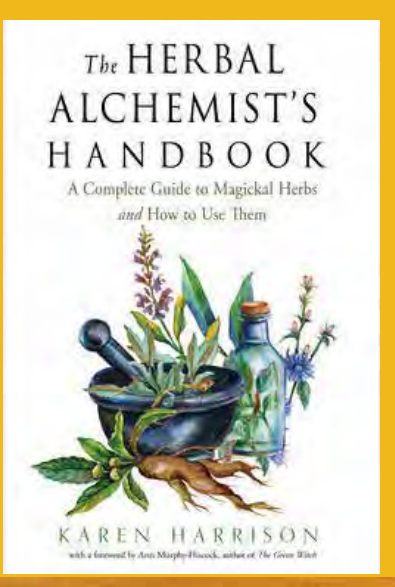
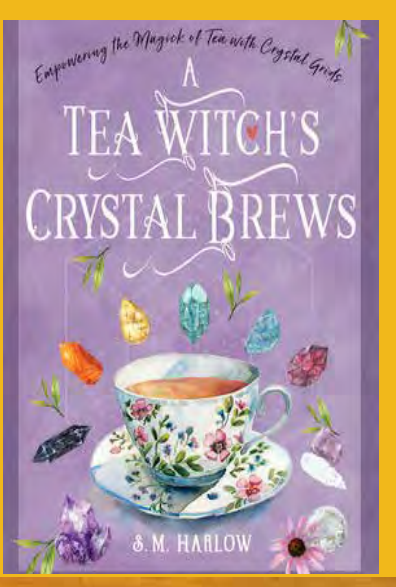






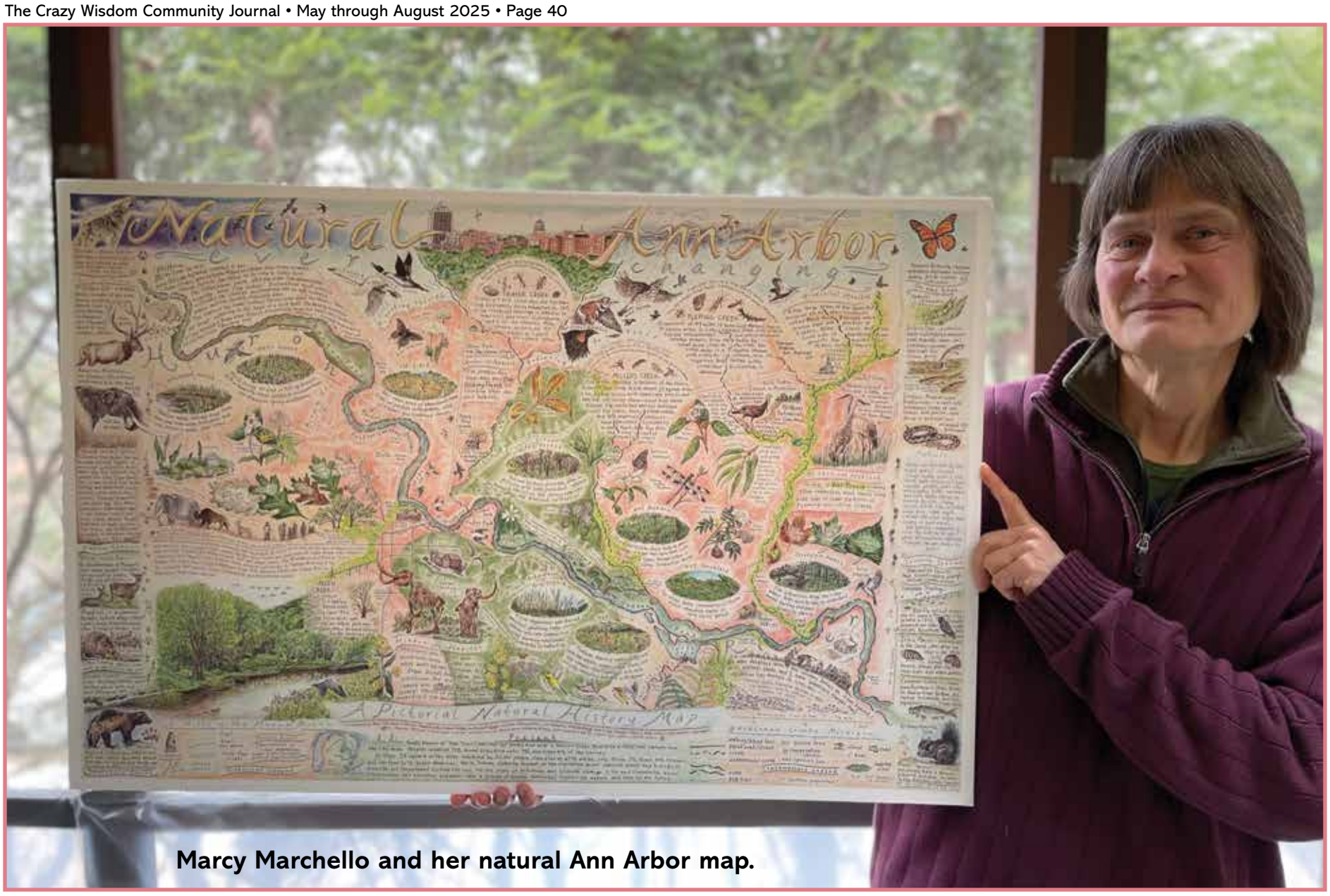
What's New in the Community

By Lynda Gronlund

This ongoing column features upcoming events within Ann Arbor/Washtenaw County and surrounding areas' Body/Mind/Spirit communities, new (during the past year or two) practitioners and holistic businesses, new books written by local/regional authors, new classes, as well as new offerings by established practitioners and holistic businesses.

On a 15-acre horse farm in Dexter, Jayne Bailey and her mother, Diane Ratkovich, are offering individual meetings and a variety of classes for families with adolescents who want to improve their communication and connection.

Photo by Mary Bortmas



Marcy Marchello and her natural Ann Arbor map.

New Practitioners and Businesses

Artist and Ann Arbor native Marcy Marchello started working on her Natural Ann Arbor Map in 2017 as a side project, working on it in spurts as she traveled home to visit her family several times a year from Massachusetts where she now lives.

Over a period of eight years, the hand-drawn map became an incredibly detailed illustration of the area's natural history from the time of mammoths and mastodons up until the present. The map is now on display and prints are available for sale at Found Gallery and at Parrish Framing, both in downtown Ann Arbor. The original map is featured in the exhibit "Along the Waterways of Washtenaw County," at the Washtenaw County Historical Society on Main Street. The exhibit runs through August 31. The map is also part of the Ann Arbor District Library's Ann Arbor 200 project, consisting of 200 digital content releases related to the city's history, celebrating the city's bicentennial year..

Marchello grew up in Dixboro, just northeast of the city of Ann Arbor. Her parents both graduated from the University of Michigan School of Art which is where she began her postsecondary education. She later studied for two years through the National Audubon Expedition Institute, a travelling art program, and eventually earned a BS in environmental education from Lesley College (now University) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is now an adaptive outdoor recreation manager for Massachusetts State Parks. Before she started her full-time career, she had a custom mapmaking business, which she had to let go.

This project was a way of reclaiming that dream. Because she was visiting Ann Arbor regularly and exploring its parks and natural areas, she felt she had an opportunity to create something unique and interesting to the community. She said it "felt like something trying to be born." As she worked on the map, and became more invested in the project, she learned more than she ever had while growing up here. She consulted some experts in the area's natural attributes and history, including Becky Hand at the city's Natural Area Preservation, Bev Willis and John Kilar at the Washtenaw County Historical Society, Dave Szczygiel, an environmental education consultant for the Ann Arbor Public Schools, Andrew MacLaren at the Ann Arbor District Library, and Paul Steen and Anita Daly at the Huron River Watershed Council. She also drew on sources like the Michigan State University's Natural Features Inventory, which contains information from detailed land surveys from the 1800s.

"Part of the fun," she said, "was figuring out how to show something as simple as the changes in the river," which was reshaped by dams as Ann Arbor grew. She learned that some of the present roads of the city began centuries ago as animal paths, then made into trails by Native Americans. The map is full of illustrations of animals, plants, and birds that live or lived in the area, information about waterways and habitats and even about invasive species, and history of the people who have lived here. She said "I believe in understanding the place you are. Not just the scenery, or a backdrop for human life…. I have a lot of awe and respect…. I hope that people will gain some of that." She views the map as "an educational tool and a treasure map," which she hopes will inspire people to look around and see the town with new eyes.

She worked on the map in spare moments, drawing and redrawing and rearranging every part multiple times. Last summer, she began to add color, a process which took two to three months. It was finally ready for printing in late 2024. "You can look at this [map] many times and see something new each time," she said.

Marcy Marchello can be reached by email at marcymarchello@gmail.com. Prints of the Natural Ann Arbor Map can be purchased at her Etsy shop: Ferncliffstudio.etsy.com or at Found Gallery or Parrish Framing. It can be viewed online at the Ann Arbor District Library's Ann Arbor 200 site: aadl.org/naturalannarbor.

STABLE WISDOM
FAMILY COACHING

Diane Ratkovich is introducing her new program, Stable Wisdom Family Coaching, this year.

Based on her 15-acre horse farm in Dexter, she is offering individual meetings and a variety of classes for families with adolescents who want to improve their communication and connection. Ratkovich holds a master's degree in human development, is certified in equine facilitated learning from two programs: Eponaquest in Arizona and Spirit of Leadership in Ohio. She is certified in mediation through Mediation Training and Consulting Michigan and has worked for 25 years with children and families. Now retired, she is excited to begin a new journey of service. Her daughter, Jayne Bailey, is a horse trainer who graduated from Michigan State University in horse management.

Bailey runs her own horse training business and also enjoys working with youth. Ratkovich said that Bailey has a strong intuition that connects her with both horses and children. Both volunteer with Detroit Horse Power, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization teaching Detroit students to ride and care for horses to develop skills that set them up for success in school, work, and life.
Stable Wisdom Family Coaching incorporates nature, music, meditation, movement, journaling, art, and horses to help parents and adolescents improve their family lives. This work can help families improve communication, resolve conflict, solve problems, enhance connection, and be fun for all family members. Emphasis is placed on developing self-compassion and compassion for others while setting boundaries and deepening trust.

Ratkovich and Bailey have lived at the current farm for seven years. It has an outdoor arena for Bailey's horse training business and plenty of room for the Stable Wisdom program. In individual family meetings, Ratkovich guides families in interacting with the horses, journaling, movement and more, while helping the family identify what issues are creating difficulties and mediates while family members make agreements between themselves. This work can be helpful for any family with tweens and teens, including but not limited to those experiencing behavioral issues. She describes it as "not therapy, but more like problem solving, while also having fun."

"Families are so pressured they don't have fun with their kids anymore," she said. It also takes pressure off of parents to have someone else be in charge for a time, allowing them to enjoy the time with their families.

Stable Wisdom Family Coaching is located at 11400 North Territorial, Dexter, MI 48130. More information is online at stablewisdom.net. Diane Ratkovich can be reached by phone at 734-845-542 or by email at connect@stablewisdom.net.

Manya Arond-Thomas M.D. is returning to Ann Arbor after a 12-year retirement in Ecuador and will be offering her services to the community as an Enneagram-informed coach, counselor, and teacher.

She has been in the field of personal development for 50 years as an energy healer, massage therapist, a counselor and psychiatrist, and as an executive leadership coach. She first learned about the Enneagram, a personality theory which classifies people into nine types based on how they relate to the world, in 1974, but didn't become a serious student of it until 2014, after a major life crisis. In 2021 she began a three-year intensive study culminating in Enneagram teacher certification in September of 2023.

In describing the Enneagram, she wrote, "The Enneagram provides a brilliant and precise map to navigate our inner world and to discover the essence of our true nature and best self. This is where our deepest potential lies. More than just a typology of nine personality types, the map gives a process of

Manya Arond-Thomas M.D. is returning to Ann Arbor.

transformation and self-actualization for each type. It is the only tool (of all the many assessments available) that integrates psychological development (gaining increasing clarity while reducing reactivity) and spiritual growth and maturing of the soul."

Arond-Thomas said that she has seen Enneagram-informed coaching help some people understand their children better, help one woman leave an abusive marriage and start a new life, and help others "jumpstart" their growth, healing, and ability to live more consciously. She wrote, "While this tool for transformation illuminates your gifts and provides a framework for our personal and spiritual evolution, it also reveals how we're often held back by the shadow side of our personality—our own deeply rooted, unconscious patterns that are hard to see." She said that the Enneagram has almost unlimited applications, including use in schools, prisons, leadership and team development. It offers ways to understand differences in communication styles, leadership styles, and to resolve conflict.

Photo by Mary Bortmas

Diane Ratkovich and her daughter Jayne Bailey of Stable Wisdom Family Coaching.

What's New in the Community continued...

Arond-Thomas offers Enneagram-informed coaching and counseling for individuals and couples, as well as Enneagram classes. She also works with leaders and teams in business settings. She will offer an introductory class titled The Enneagram: A Path to Liberation in June, with dates and location to be announced.

Manya Arond-Thomas can be reached via email at Globalmagic1@gmail.com or by phone or Whatsapp at (954)789-4052. Her website is manyaarondthomas.com.

In February, Toni Dallas opened an Ypsilanti office for Modern Shaman, her plant-based wellness brand offering wellness coaching, an herbal apothecary, functional mushrooms, and native medicinal landscape consultations.

Dallas is an herbalist trained under local Master herbalist Jim McDonald in his ten-month Lindera intensive in energetic folk herbalism. She is also Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) certified for wild mushroom identification, and has done additional training in various foraging, wildcrafting, and related topics through the Michigan Folk School.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Dallas worked in supply chain technology sales and consulting in food, drugs, and supplements for over ten years. She had realized that food, spices, and supplements imported from other countries, and even from the United States were in many cases "very compromised." Since supplements are not regulated by the FDA, she explained, they are even more likely than food or drugs to contain contaminants from sawdust to heavy metals to rat feces. At the same time, especially with the supply chain chaos of the pandemic, she saw that things were being imported from far away at great cost when they are grown right here in Michigan. Global shortages, tariffs, and trade issues, she said, would be negated if we had a simpler, more local supply chain. Community-based food and medicine sourcing seemed to her to be a much better way. "I got fed up with the impact of large and complex supply chains and wanted to do something for my family and community by providing my own 'farm-to-farmacy' experience," she said.

Around the time she left her corporate job in 2020, she moved with her husband and children to a five-acre property in Superior Township where they started work to replace one and a half acres of manicured lawn with Michigan native pollinator-friendly plants and medicinal herbs. They removed another two acres of invasive plants from a forested area and replaced them with native plants appropriate to the area. She began experimenting with wildcrafting and cultivation, inoculating the property with various functional mushroom spawn and introducing more medicinal plants. In late 2022 she formed an LLC and began offering wildcrafted products, functional mushrooms, and advice around herbal medicines at first to friends and neighbors and branching out as she made connections.

Functional mushrooms, Dallas said, tend to have an adaptogenic effect, bringing body systems back into equilibrium. She has wildcrafted Ganoderma (Reishi) and Turkey Tail, and she is cultivating Stropharia rugosoannulata (Winecap or Garden Giant mushrooms), which she said are native to this area and which remove heavy metals, biotoxins, and other contaminants from soil, leaving behind clean compost. They are gregarious growers, she said, and also a delicious renewable food source, containing high amounts of protein and vitamin D.

Dallas has done work as a sustainability project manager for the Rudloph Steiner Lower School of Ann Arbor where her children attend. There she designed and managed installation of a food forest, mushroom beds, and medicinal herb spiral on campus. She has done similar projects for private residences. She has also led a nature-based play group called Tree Town Tots, taking children on foraging adventures where they learn land literacy, plant and mushroom identification, and develop a reverence for nature. She is associated with a consortium of practitioners including MDs, Dos, LMSWs and alternative wellness providers, offering various mind, body, and spiritual wellness services. Through cooperation and referrals, they are able to offer holistic customized wellness plans with mind/body/spirit and earth balance in mind. "My aim is to connect clients with the right resources to achieve their wellness objectives, always with a tie to nature and spirituality."

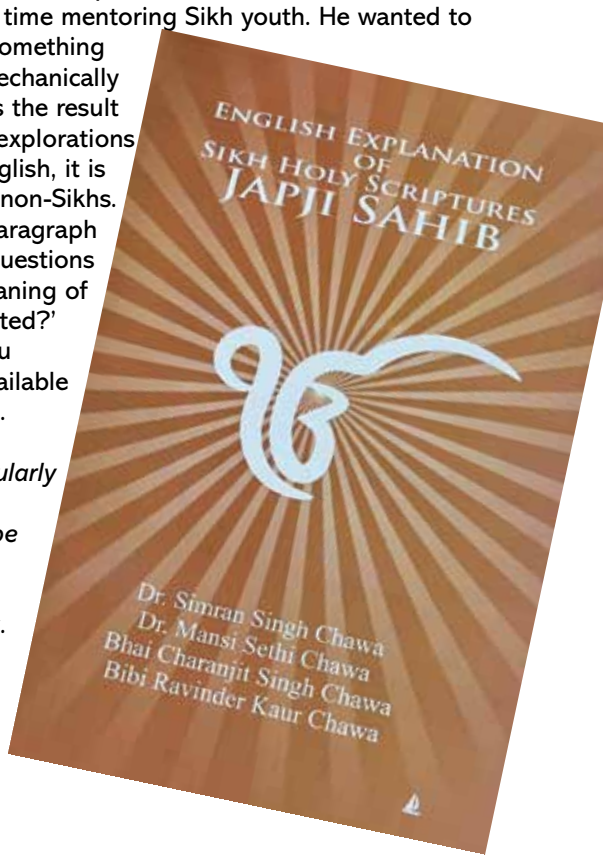
The Modern Shaman office is located at 876 Grove Street., Ypsilanti, MI 48197. Office hours are by appointment, seven days a week. Toni Dallas can be reached by email at toni.m.dallas@gmail.com and more information is available on her website, modernshaman.net.

New Books by Area Authors

Local husband and wife psychiatric doctors Simran and Mansi Chawa recently published their coauthored book: *English Explanation of Sikh Holy Scriptures Japji Sahib: A guide to understanding Japji Sahib.*

The Chawas are members of the Sikh faith, which is the fifth largest religion in the world. Guru Nanak, the Indian spiritual teacher who lived in the 15th and 16th centuries, regarded as the founder of Sikhism and the first of ten Sikh gurus, wrote a body of hymns, scriptures, and prayers and traveled the known world at the time spreading the message of the Oneness of all. His most famous composition, "Japji Sahib," the song of the divine, is recited daily by Sikhs. Dr. Simran Chawa explained that in Japji Sahib, Guru Nanak "describes the spiritual journey step by step, sometimes addressing Yogis, sometimes singing the virtues of God in a state of ecstasy. He also walks us through the different psychological-spiritual realms that we progress through as we ascend on the inner path."

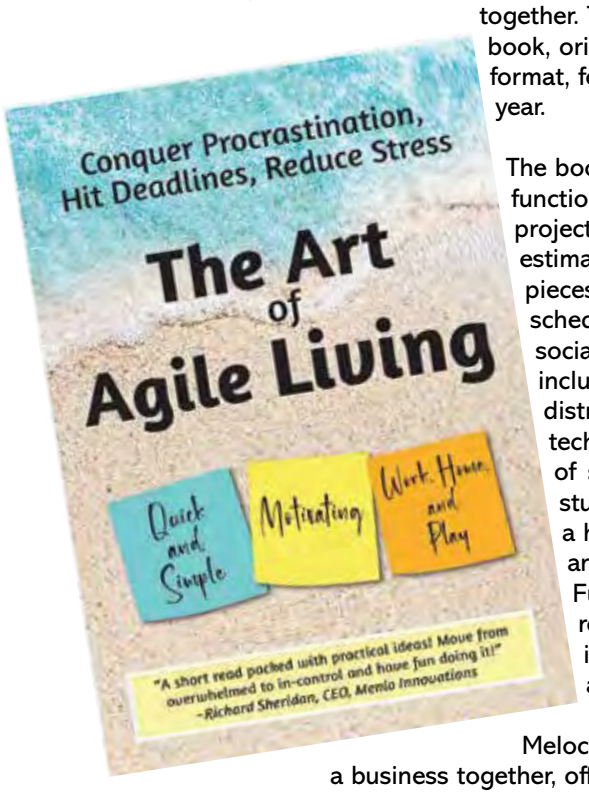
"Sikh," said Chawa, means student or disciple. Chawa was born into the Sikh faith here in Michigan and spends time mentoring Sikh youth. He wanted to really dig into the Japji Sahib, as something that Sikhs tend to recite almost mechanically as a formality, he said. The book is the result of his and his wife's and parents' explorations and reflections. Because it is in English, it is accessible to younger people and non-Sikhs. It explores the meaning of each paragraph and views it through the lens of questions we ask today, like 'What is the meaning of life?' and 'Why was the world created?' "Through it, we hope to make Guru Nanak's path of enlightenment available to the general public," Chawa said.



Drs. Simran and Mansi Chawa regularly post about Gurbani—the study of the Sikh scripture—on their Youtube channel, @gurbanimessage1504. They also have a Facebook page dedicated to the topic at facebook.com/gurbanimessageenglish/. They can be reached via email at mansiandsimran@gmail.com.

Local authors Helene Gidley and Thomas Meloche published their book, *The Art of Agile Living: Conquer Procrastination, Hit Deadlines, Reduce Stress* in May of 2024.

Agile Living is a project management approach which emphasizes adaptability, collaboration, and continuous improvement. It started in the IT field and was codified in The Agile Manifesto in 2001, quickly spreading to many other industries. Gidley and Meloche met when Gidley took a class from Meloche about using Agile techniques. She was subsequently downsized from her job at Pfizer and joined Meloche's company, Menlo Innovations. Meloche then moved to Texas for a few years. When he returned, he and Gidley reconnected. She pitched a collaboration to him, showing him how she had applied Agile concepts to manage her work and time. Meloche suggested they write a book together. They proceeded to write the book, originally publishing in a digital format, followed by a printed version last year.


Conquer Procrastination, Hit Deadlines, Reduce Stress
The Art of Agile Living
Quick and Simple
Motivating
Work, Home, and Play
"A short read packed with practical ideas! Move from overwhelmed to in-control and have fun doing it!"
-Richard Sheridan, CEO, Menlo Innovations

The book focuses on key executive functioning skills: breaking down projects into bite sized pieces; estimating the time each of these pieces will take; establishing a daily schedule with time for study, exercise, socializing, and sleep. It also includes developing a plan to avoid distractions of social media and technology. Mastering these kinds of skills, Gidley explained, helps students and adults to maintain a healthy, positive self-image and succeed in school and work. Further, the strategies empower readers to reduce overwhelm, increase focus, and embrace adaptability with grace.

Meloche and Gidley have also formed a business together, offering classes and coaching in the Art of Agile Living techniques and their applications for people in their personal and professional lives, reducing stress and procrastination with which so many struggle.

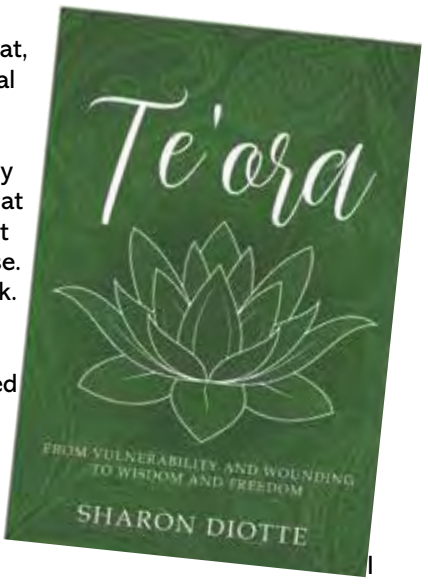
On Thursday, July 17, they will host a book signing and workshop called„ "There's a Book in You, Let's Get it Out." The workshop is designed to "transform [participants] from passive listener to active contributor," and "spotlight the significance of storytelling in the Agile community." Practical advice will be offered on getting started and overcoming common obstacles like writer's block and time constraints. An interactive portion will allow attendees to brainstorm and outline potential topics, fostering a collaborative atmosphere for idea exchange and development.

The workshop will be hosted at Gidley and Meloche's office at 455 East Eisenhower Parkway, Suite 300, Ann Arbor, MI 48108. The office is open by appointment. Helene Gidley can be reached at Helene@A2Agile.com, and Thomas Meloche can be reached at tom@a2agile.com. More information is on their website at A2Agile.com.

Sharon Diotte, who lives in Ann Arbor, published her book *Te'Ora: From Vulnerability and Wounding to Wisdom and Freedom* in September of 2024.

The Rapa Nui word "Te'ora" means "a beautiful new life." The book is a memoir that reads like a novel, telling the story of Diotte's wide-ranging life in Canada, the United States, Pakistan, and Rapa Nui (Easter Island), and her journey of healing and building a new, thriving, beautiful life after terrible trauma caused by domestic violence, rape, and living in a patriarchal, misogynistic society.

Diotte said that she began working on the book in her 50s but was not ready at that time to write about her trauma, though she was writing a daily log that would eventually help her put together the story of her life. She wanted to be able to write from a place of having healed more and lived more in order for her story to feel more inspirational. The Covid-19 lockdown was a great impetus for her to finally write her story and to navigate the emotional energies generated by the writing. She is now 76 years old. She said that she has had a lot of therapy over the years and has been diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD). She said, "PTSD doesn't mean that something is wrong with us or we're weak; it means we are strong." She wrote her story in part to share with other women who have experienced violence and abuse at the hands of men they loved. She wanted to support them into seeing their own strengths and path to healing.



Diotte worked as a nurse, and she observed that, "people don't heal if they only address chemical modules of care. Mind and spirit need to be included for healing." Part of her healing was looking deeply into her spiritual path, especially exploring the divine feminine. She explained that this allowed her to heal by deeply knowing that women are important, strong, and have purpose. This journey culminated in her writing this book.

Publishing her story was difficult, as she struggled with shame about what had happened to her and anxiety about what people in her life would think. But, she said, "we all have our sacred marching orders." It felt very heavy, and she felt very vulnerable. She said she, "wrote it like I was walking hip-deep through mud." In finally getting it written, she said, "I felt like I could step back and see my life like a mural. It was all interwoven with all the beautiful things that had happened, too. Then you see that your life really is meaningful and has purpose and every person is necessary." She credited age, therapy, and wonderful friends and family with making her finally ready to write and share this story.

She is grateful to have received a lot of support and appreciation from people she knows and others. Her children are in support of her and have praised her for her strength. One woman said she was glad it wasn't simply a man-bashing story. Diotte said she has a beautiful husband and son and that she knows men are beautiful. She has received messages from friends and family and others, acknowledging her strength. She said that she wants this story to be encouraging—to be about not only healing and getting past what happened, but truly thriving and creating one's own beautiful new life.

Sharon Diotte's website is SharonDiotte.com. She can be reached via email at Teoramemoire@gmail.com. Te'Ora: From Vulnerability and Wounding to Wisdom and Freedom *is available at local libraries as a Kindle e-book and at the Crazy Wisdom Bookstore.*

Author Sharon Diotte

Author Dianna Rhyan, PhD, LPCC, published her most recent book *Mestra the Shapeshifter: Ancient Heroine of the Sacred Grove* as part of Moon Books' Pagan Portals series in late 2024.

Rhyan is a therapist and mythologist who has studied nature goddesses, languages, and the spirituality of sacred landscapes throughout her career in academia. She fell in love with mythology and goddesses in the third grade, she said, and has maintained this passion all her life. As a college professor she has taught courses on various goddesses and heroines, including one on Helen of Troy who she described as "very misunderstood" and another on Penelope, queen of Ithaca in the *Odyssey*, who outwitted one hundred and eight suitors to stay faithful to her long-absent husband Odysseus.

This book focuses on the myth of Mestra the shapeshifter, a little-known heroine about whom only fragments of the story survive. Repeatedly sold by her father for her bride-price, she used her shapeshifting ability to escape her marriages and return home in the shape of beasts. Rhyan invites modern readers to journey with Mestra, exploring transformation, creativity, cycles of change, and the pull and power of nature and elemental forces. Journaling questions are provided at the end of the book, and Rhyan suggests sitting in nature to contemplate them—perhaps even finding a sacred grove or other special place as Mestra did to journey spiritually in a chosen sacred place.

Rhyan is also the author of *Staff of Laurel, Staff of Ash: Sacred Landscape in Ancient Nature Myth*, also from Moon Books. She lives in Ohio but frequents the Ann Arbor area, where her son lives and works. "I am an author who wanders in, writes about, and cherishes the green spaces of Ann Arbor," she said. She said that she is excited to "bring these voices that are fading from the world alive again."

Join Dianna Rhyan at Crazy Wisdom on Wednesday, May 28 for an author event. See the listing in the Calendar under the heading Book Events on page 98. More information on Rhyan and her books is available at staffoflaurel.com. She can be reached by email at staffoflaurel@gmail.com.

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Former psychotherapist-turned-intuitive business coach and author, Tal Shai published the Inner Child Soul Movement Cards in the spring of 2025.

They are an oracle deck that is designed to "deepen your connection with overlooked aspects of your younger self, fostering self-awareness and healing." Shai holds an M.A. in counseling psychology with a specialization in spiritual psychology and has over thirty years of experience in the psycho-spiritual development field. She is the founder of the Soul Movement Method, a "somatic-based, trauma-informed methodology" which helps to "reveal hidden blocks, clear ancestral entanglements, and resolve root-cause issues… optimizing success in relationships, business, and life." Shai has created several oracle decks in her Soul Movement Cards line, but this is only her seconddeck that is available as physically printed cards. Others, such as the Inner Soul Home, Twin Flame, Mystic Hag, and Heal the Root, are available in a digital format.

Shai uses the cards in coordination with the Soul Movement Method to help her business coaching clients, including small business owners, project managers, and CEOs of large companies. She also trains coaches, therapists, and healing practitioners in the Soul Movement Method to integrate the system into their practices for their clients' and their own transformational work. The cards, she said, can be helpful tools to facilitate the exploration and understanding of soul-centered concepts, and assist with introspection, healing, and psycho-spiritual development. They can be used by professionals for client work, as well as by "anyone on a journey of self-discovery."

Shai said that she has incorporated inner child work into her psycho-spiritual practice for almost 25 years. "Our childhood experiences shape us in ways that run deep, and much of my work is about reconnecting with these younger parts of ourselves for healing and integration." The Inner Child deck helps to "bridge the gap between the wisdom of the child within and the mature strength of the adult you have become," she explained. She imagines the inner child speaking directly to the adult self through the cards' messages, "revealing what it needs to feel safe, whole, and integrated."

The Inner Child Soul Movement Cards are available at the Crazy Wisdom Bookstore or can be purchased online at SoulMovementCards.com. More information about them and about Tal Shai is available at talshai.com, and she can be reached via email at SoulMovementMethod@gmail.com.

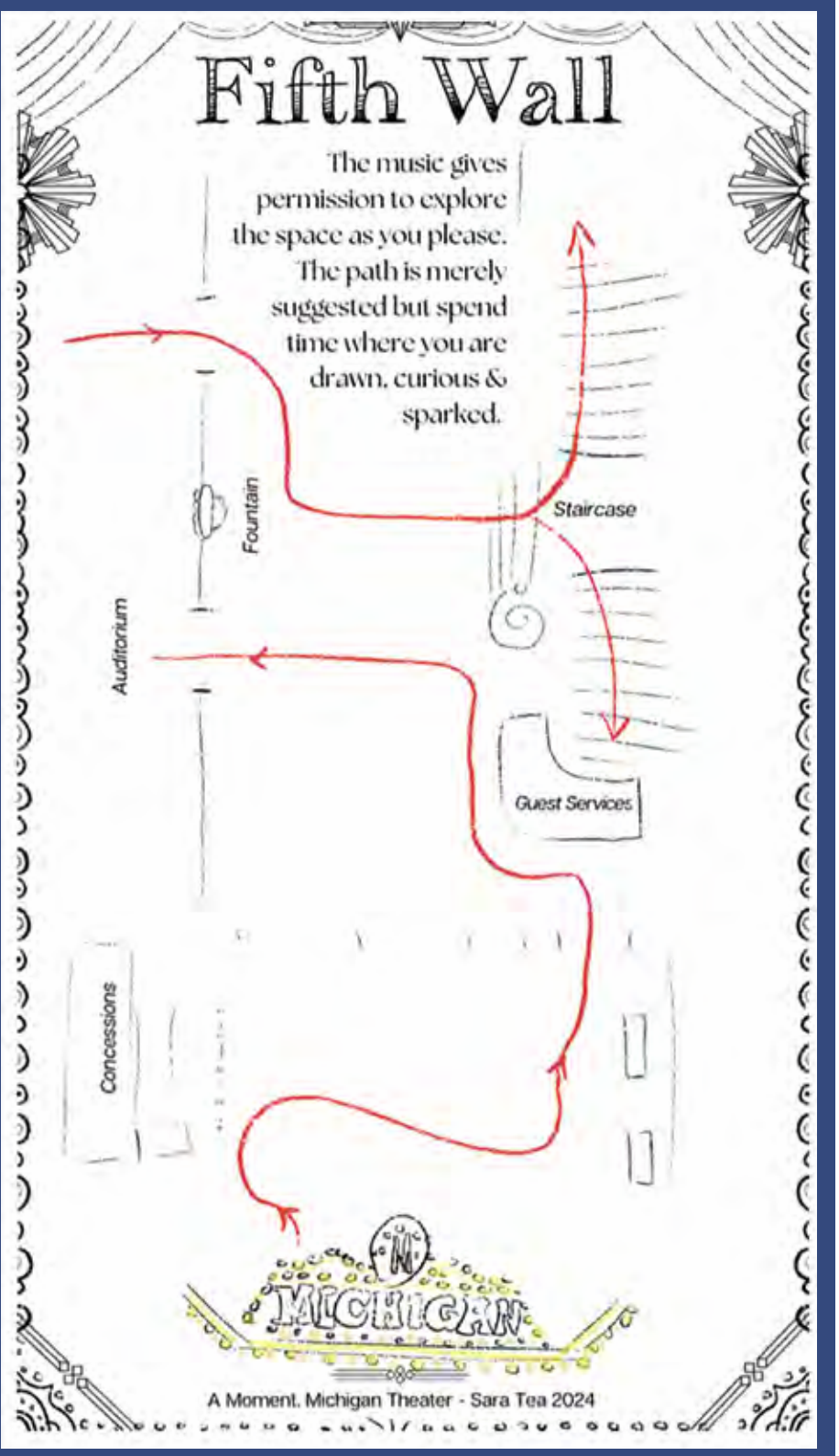
New Offerings by Established Businesses and Practitioners

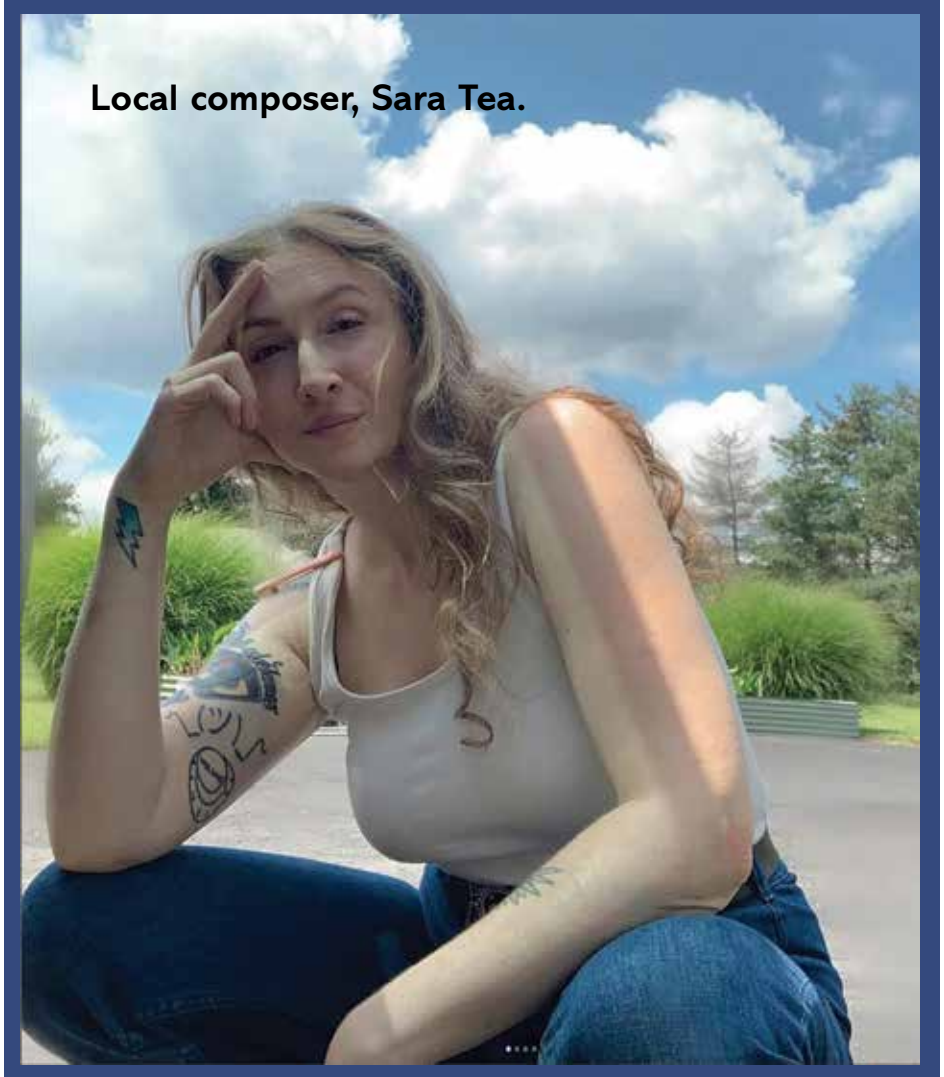
As part of the Ann Arbor District Library's Ann Arbor 200 project celebrating the city's bicentennial, local composer Sarah Tea released "Fifth Wall," a soundtrack for the historic Michigan Theater.

The digital soundtrack is available virtually, allowing listeners to explore the 1927 building while experiencing the music. A map of the theater with a suggested path for the soundtrack is included on the library's permanent web page for the piece. Tea talked about growing up in the 1980s, when many movie theaters built in the 1930s were neglected or carelessly updated by destroying the original ornate decoration with layers of paint, neon signs, and ugly carpets. Today, some of these theaters have been restored to their original architectural and decorative grandeur including Ann Arbor's Michigan Theater. In this project, Tea invites listeners to appreciate the theater for itself as an architectural work of art and a place of rich history. It has housed many performances and soundtracks, but this soundtrack is its own.

Tea said "at its core, this project is about pausing. It's about reflecting on the individuals and the hard work that goes into creating spaces like this in our community. With this soundtrack, we're breaking the 'Fifth Wall'—bridging the gap between creators, caretakers, performers, and audiences." She added that much of the time, people don't feel they have permission, or a reason, to pause and appreciate a place and take in the full experience. This soundtrack is "a permission slip to really take time with the theater and the space in a new way." The piece was composed and recorded digitally, with a mixture of synthesizers, audio samples from the interior space of objects within the Michigan Theater, and samples from the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which were made available to musicians during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown so that they could continue creating and recording. Tea said that she would love for the piece to be played live, but funding would need to be obtained to make this possible.

Tea is chronically ill, and the ability to use digital programs and samples for composing has been very valuable to her. Other songs and projects she's done have incorporated a mix of live musicians and digital/orchestral samples as well. Her recent work Resonant Soundscapes used the downtown Ann


Fifth Wall
The music gives permission to explore the space as you please. The path is merely suggested but spend time where you are drawn, curious & sparked.
Fountain
Staircase
Auditorium
Guest Services
Concessions
MICHIGAN
A Moment. Michigan Theater - Sara Tea 2024


Local composer, Sara Tea.

What's New in the Community continued...

Arbor belltower carillon mixed with organ and electronics to "emphasize the meaningful resonances that emerge between people and the spaces they occupy."

She is also an advocate for women in and around music, including sharing resources, access to education, and removing gatekeeping in an industry that is not always welcoming. She is part of a collective creative studio and record label of chronically ill artists and makers called Magic Guts Collective, with artists in Detroit, Denver, Los Angeles, and New York City. Her work encompasses elements of experimental, ambient, drone, and contemporary music. She also has a band that uses elements of neo-folk and neo-psychedelic music.

The permanent website for "Fifth Wall" through the Ann Arbor District Library is aadl.org/fifthwall. The Michigan Theater is located at 603 East Liberty Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Sara Tea can be reached via email at info@saratea.com and her website is saratea.com.

Local writer, healer, artist, and teacher Mary Ledvina.

Local writer, healer, artist, and teacher Mary Ledvina finished advanced creativity coaching training with Eric Maisel in May and is accepting coaching clients.

"Creativity coaching is a way to get help and support on the challenges and concerns that are particular to being or wanting to be a creator," she explained.

Ledvina considers herself a multi-creative with interests and experience in writing, visual arts, music, improvisation, and dance. She has been studying the creative process for over twenty years. As a healer, she uses many healing approaches for creativity aligning with the mind, body, and spirit. She is excited to help people create a regular writing or art practice, finish a project they have been stuck on, clear blocks, get clarity on what they want to do creatively, or reduce anxiety as they begin or continue to share their work. She can work with clients via email, phone, Zoom, or in person.

"Creativity can be really healing and really helpful," she said. Creative endeavors can be done as a career, or for personal healing, as a form of self-care, to help with physical or mental illness, or a combination of any of these. Her goal for her clients is to have self-care and healing be a part of their creative practice, not just constant pushing to produce. It should include self-expression, fun, and play, she said. "A creative practice can help people lead more balanced lives and can also be very spiritual," she explained. Working with people in this way comes very naturally to her, and she has been doing it for friends prior to having any formal training in it for a long time.
In addition to her new creativity coaching offering, Ledvina will lead two classes this summer. Her nature journaling class will take participants to the Matthei Botanical Gardens on Thursdays from 2 -4:00 p.m. May 8 through June 12.
On Thursday May 29 she will teach a class on Plein Air Poetry which is poetry inspired by nature and written outdoors; She will also teach at Matthei Botanical Gardens from 6 - 8:00 p.m.

More information and class registration are available online at maryledvina.com. Mary Ledvina can be reached via email at mary@maryledvina.com.

Chelsea-based small-scale herb farmer, somatic practitioner, and local food advocate Emily Springfield is working on a new project: creating a collaborative of local small-scale medicinal herb farmers in order to increase access to high quality, locally grown herbs and provide income for those farmers and processors.

She is calling the project the Gathered Roots Herb Growers' Guild. 2025 will be a year of exploration, experimentation, and vision casting as a group of around six farmers begin to test the concept. Springfield explained that ninety percent of medicinal herbs are grown abroad. With supply chains disrupted first by Covid-19 and now by potential tariffs and international relations disruptions, as well as run-of-the-mill weather and shipping delays, the availability of herbs can fluctuate wildly. In addition, the costs of shipping both monetarily and environmentally add up. With current uncertainty around Medicaid, the CDC, and other healthcare institutions, she feels that the need for alternative medicines will only increase in the near future.

Many medicinal herbs grow well here in Michigan, and for the tropical herbs that would not grow here, she explained, there are alternatives that have the same effects. However, very few people are growing them for sale. She said that there is only one herb farm in the state that she would consider "commercial sized," and it is only farming one acre and is out of stock of many items frequently. Access to land, she said, is not as much of a problem as she had originally thought, but there are other problems that do face would-be medicinal herb farmers.

One issue is that most people interested in growing herbs don't want to farm full-time. Farming is difficult work that can be hard on the body, and profit margins are slim. Most people are doing it as a part time endeavor or retirement project. They want it to be sustainable for their physical, mental, and financial health. Said Springfield of her own herb-growing endeavors, "It's nice additional income, but it's never going to pay my mortgage."

Another issue is that consumers want access to a large variety of small quantities of herbs, but it is difficult to grow a huge number of different plants on a given farm. Different plants grow well in different conditions: different levels of sun exposure and different types of soil. It is much easier to grow three or four kinds of herbs than 30, but potential customers generally don't have the time or inclination to source each herb they need from separate farms. Hobbyists growing for their own use tend to hit a "weird spot where you're growing way more than you can use in one year but it's not enough to open a store or possibly even support one herbalist."

Labor is also hard to come by. Harvesting and processing herbs—drying them, cutting them, crushing or powdering them, takes knowledge, skill, and physical effort, and the work is intermittent, dependent on growth cycles. Incorrect drying or processing can result in moldy, damaged, unsellable products. Equipment, like an undercutter, which makes the work of digging up roots much easier, is also expensive.
Finally, making others aware of the herbs one has for sale, and actually selling them, is also a lot of work. After all the labor of growing, harvesting, and preparing herbs for sale, a farmer may have to sell at farmer's markets or shows, or figure out how to set up a website, market themselves online, package and ship, among other tasks.

All of these issues can be addressed, Springfield believes, with collaboration. Expensive equipment can be shared or rented between farms. A single website where multiple farms can list what they have for sale can help customers find what they need without individual farmers feeling they need to grow everything. People who are interested in earning income through harvesting and processing herbs can create more steady work by rotating through several farms. Farmers can communicate and grow whatever grows best on their properties. Marketing, shipping, and other tasks will cost less when several farms are sharing those costs.

Emily Springfield, founder of the Gathered Roots Herb Growers' Guild

Submit your listing for the September through December 2025 issue.

Please note that the "What's New in the Community" column is part of the editorial (not paid-for-advertising) part of the CW Journal, and the editors may or may not include what you submit. Whether the editors include material or not will depend on space considerations, as well as other editorial issues, such as the need for high resolution jpgs and the overall mix of stories included in the "What's New in the Community" column in a given issue.

If you would like to submit information to be considered for this column, please email communitynews@crazywisdom.net.

The firm deadline for submissions for the next issue (September through December 2025) is July 1, 2025.

This year, Springfield said she and a few other farmers in Chelsea, Ypsilanti, and nearby areas are going to attempt a test run of the concept. Each farm will grow and process a pound or two or three different items that grow well on their specific land. Together, they will sell what they grow at the Great Lakes Herb Faire in Chelsea in November. "This will let us test things at a moderate scale," she said.

Anyone interested in getting involved with the Gathered Roots Herb Growers' Guild may fill out an interest form at the website, gatheredrootsguild.com. People interested in learning to harvest and process herbs on other people's land for income are especially invited to inquire. Emily Springfield can be reached via email at info@gatheredrootsguild.com.

This spring through early winter, artist and teacher Rocky Shadowbear Rains will lead Earth Church: outdoor workshop excursions in which participants learn to recognize liminal places in nature and work with land spirits.

These workshops will take place in metro parks, state parks, and national parks, inviting city dwellers to get outside, experience nature, and commune respectfully with nature spirits. One of the Earth Church events will be a "field trip" to the Serpent Mound in Ohio, a sacred earthwork resembling a huge snake made by the Adena or Fort Ancient culture of Native Americans at least 900 years ago. Rains said he wants to remind people that there are sacred spots close by, to teach them to approach them properly, and touch the power in those spots. He said that Earth Church is important to him because of the times we live in. "We need to reconnect with the living planet," he said. "If we don't take care of her, we are dooming ourselves." He wants to make people more aware of the responsibility we have to this place, because right now there is no Planet B. "People say it's too late," he said. "I don't think so, but we need to wake up." Earth Church for May is scheduled for May 18 at Lower Huron Metropark at 11:00 a.m. More dates and locations are to be determined.

He will also facilitate a workshop called Art as a Spiritual Practice in which participants examine various spiritual traditions and create projects inspired by them. He had the idea at a paint and pour event he was invited to by a friend—to gather and make art or crafts together with others, but to put a spiritual aspect into it. He has taught classes on shamanism and druidism where participants create crafts like medicine bundles or crane bags from Celtic shamanism. These are both collections of power objects—mementos of powerful times in one's life or things they may have found on a vision quest or walkabout. He teaches about putting these bags together and choosing objects to put in them. He has also helped people create maps and collages of otherworld travels, feather wands, corn husk dolls, and other crafts. Workshops are scheduled for June 22, June 29, August 25, September 14, and October 12. Times and locations are to be determined.

More details will be announced on Rocky Rains' Facebook page at facebook.com/rocky.rains.9. Rocky Rains can be reached via email at rainsrocky4@gmail.com.

Artist and teacher Rocky Shadowbear Rains with a few former students.

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THE MAJORITY OF THE FITNESS INDUSTRY TELLS YOU WHAT TO DO AND CHEERS YOU ON BUT DOESN'T TELL YOU HOW OR WHY. THEY GIVE YOU A FITNESS EXPERIENCE THAT FEELS GOOD, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING. IS IT LEADING YOU TO A TRUE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING?

LAUREN HOFFMAN:

Owner of Forged Barbell Holistic Strength Gym

Interview by Kaili Brooks • Photo by Hilary Nichols

As an accomplished athlete, real-food advocate, and wellness guru, Hoffman seeks to serve the whole person with her unique fitness philosophy.

Kaili Brooks: How did you enter into the fitness world? Were you always interested in fitness?

Lauren Hoffman: I've always been interested in everything. I knew from a young age that moving my body was a tool that is very effective at managing my feelings and helping me think. I've always been an athlete, starting with climbing trees and being outside. That [interest] turned into organized sports like lacrosse and snowboarding. Everything I did was at the extreme. I had to race; I had to win. I was obsessed with how to optimize peak performance in everything I did—but I was never taught the other pieces of the puzzle. I was never given good information about nutrition or how to move. No one taught me how the body works, I was just told how to win. After I had my oldest daughter, I wanted to perform the way I used to, but the exercises I was given by the gym trainer didn't feel right. I was running and running and running, but nothing was changing. Because of this, I realized something was wrong with the system, something wasn't true. It felt like there were all these pieces and I couldn't figure out how to put them together in a single system. It was around this time I found the Chek Institute and bought his Holistic Lifestyle Coach Level One, and things were connected and related as a single path forward. Everything is everything; it's all the same from different perspectives. Focusing on strength taught me a new way to focus on my goals. Rather than having a single system that everyone fits into, I had to create an organization that fits into each client.

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Kaili Brooks: So that realization is when you started Forged Barbell?

Lauren Hoffman: I was a CrossFit coach for 20 years, and I was the technique and form person. I would watch a client walk in and see exactly what they needed, but I would have to give them what was on the board. I wouldn't do that, but I would get into trouble because I wasn't following protocol. This just kept happening. I started calling what I was doing Forged Barbell but was renting space in someone else's gym. I was only training individuals, but I realized a fitness revolution couldn't occur in a vacuum: we needed to be a team; we needed to have a bigger impact. When I left that space, it was sink or swim. I could go back to my garage, or rent another space and run into more ideological headbutting, or I could find space that was mine and a team that believes what I believe in. I had no money, just a dream of a space and the pieces just fell together. All of a sudden, I had a space and had to design a gym. It truly takes a village to make this all work. That was July of 2018, and by October we had memberships. The universe only says yes.

Kaili Brooks: What is the basis of your personal training philosophy?

Lauren Hoffman: I like doing what works. I have no boundaries, judgements, or restrictions. What works for one person with their goal is not going to work for another person with the same goal. If we look at it in terms of gap analysis, where are you now? Where do you want to go? What do you need to get there? What's stopping you from getting there? Each person is a new challenge. Once we meet one goal, it's dream time! What's the next goal? We're going to celebrate the win, rest, and reset. It all has to be integrated. If you're not well fed, you can't think or plan clearly and you'll feel overwhelmed. There are all these fitness paradigms from yoga to strongman, how do they all fit together? The art form is knowing when to pull from where to give someone the next step.

Kaili Brooks: What sets Forged Barbell apart?

Lauren Hoffman: Our system is built around each individual member and their unique goals. We have a gym fitness program, but which pieces each member is prescribed is individualized based on their current status, their goals, and what they enjoy. What kind of strength do you want or need? We work with each member to ensure their fitness work is getting them what they want both in group settings and one-on-one. Obtaining holistic strength must start with a holistic approach. Lifting weights alone will never address the barriers to health. The gym's program is balanced, but many people have imbalances resulting in low back pain, bunions, etc. These people benefit more from an unbalanced program! We give them full orthopedic assessments to determine the root cause and respond using exercise and lifestyle to relieve these symptoms.

WHEN I LEFT THAT SPACE, IT WAS SINK OR SWIM. I COULD GO BACK TO MY GARAGE, OR RENT ANOTHER SPACE AND RUN INTO MORE IDEOLOGICAL HEADBUTTING, OR I COULD FIND SPACE THAT WAS MINE AND A TEAM THAT BELIEVES WHAT I BELIEVE IN.

Kaili Brooks: How do you define holistic strength?

Lauren Hoffman: Holistic strength means fully integrated. We could talk about the cellular level, the organ level, the whole body. We could talk about the energy systems and muscle fiber types. The physical, emotional, and spiritual. We have to integrate it so that everything is happening all the time, all at once. That's how we manifest everything we want. You have all these spiritual masters ignoring their bodies and the high-level football athlete making millions eating poorly and getting 'Me Too'd' because they're not integrated. You have to make it so that you aren't creating chaos in one part of your life and success in another… and a squat is never just a squat. It's medicine. We have to see if it's the medicine we need.

Kaili Brooks: There's a common sentiment today that everyone should be lifting weights. What's your opinion on that?

Lauren Hoffman: They shouldn't! The majority of the fitness industry tells you what to do and cheers you on but doesn't tell you how or why. They give you a fitness experience that feels good, but you don't know where you're going. Is it leading you to a true spiritual awakening? Weights strengthen the body, muscles, fascia, and neurological communication. It's a way of doing work that's simple and well defined. Emotional strength is harder. I have to be able to stabilize myself in my truth. A deadlift can help me do that, it's a tool to give me a thicker shell. As long as I'm integrated. To assume that everyone should be lifting weights is to assume that everyone should be getting stronger. That's not necessarily true. You need a stable foundation to be able to put weights on and the willingness to take ownership over your own journey.

Kaili Brooks: You also offer nutrition coaching. What is ancestral nutrition?

Lauren Hoffman: As soon as you put a name on something it has artificial boundaries. A diet has all the judgements and arbitrary constrictions. We've evolved over thousands of years, and we used to eat what the Earth provided us. There have been some big shifts in that. Our bodies have evolved to gain energy from what we put into it. Thinking of food as a source of energy and information, it needs to come from something real. Real soil, real sun. If you start from this foundation, it starts your baseline. Throw out the stuff that causes harm. Are you eating as a sacred practice and honoring the process of bringing energy and information into you with the intention and time you need to do it? Universal statements don't work, which is why finding your specific owner's manual is important. The body is an onion with many layers. It's never just about how much weight is on the barbell.

Forged Barbell is located at 251 Jackson Plaza Suite C, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. If you'd like to learn more about Forged barbell call (313) 410-3696, email forgedbarbella2@gmail.com, visit forged-barbell.com, or find them on Instagram @forgedbarbell. For more from Lauren, find her on Instagram at @holistic_strength_coach.

THE POWER OF MUSIC:

Local Music Scene is a Source of Healing and Connection

By Lisa Viger-Gotte

"Music is inherently an emotional experience, whether while performing it or hearing it. Some people are reached by song lyrics in a way that a sermon could never reach them. Some people are moved by a chord progression or a minor key, even if they have no idea why," said Katie Geddes. As the Director of the Green Wood Coffee House Music Series since 2000, Geddes has organized hundreds of concerts featuring musicians ranging from local performers to Grammy nominated artists like Sophie B. Hawkins and even the legendary poet and lyricist Rod McKuen.

From ancient rituals to modern therapy sessions, sound has been used to soothe the mind, lift the spirit, and aid in physical recovery. Music can heal—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Scientific studies reveal that music can even lower stress hormones, reduce pain, and improve mood, making it a powerful tool for well-being. Green Wood Coffee House, with locations in Grass Lake and Ann Arbor, has been a platform for musical connection since 1994 with the mission being to, "provide a safe, wholesome venue for audiences to enjoy music and community; to provide a high-quality venue for acoustic musicians to perform."

"Music is inherently an emotional experience, whether while performing it or hearing it. Some people are reached by song lyrics in a way that a sermon could never reach them. Some people are moved by a chord progression or a minor key, even if they have no idea why."

—Katie Geddes

Recent performers include award-winning singer-songwriters Mary Gauthier and Jaimee Harris. Both Gauthier and Harris credit music as key to their paths to emotional well-being, sobriety, and recovery. Gauthier even carries this message to veterans with her Songwriting with Soldiers program, saying, "Songs can help us heal. They have the power to alchemize some of life's hardest blows. They do it by bringing forth empathy and connection."

Mary Gauthier is no stranger to struggle. Growing up adopted and gay in the deep south, she's the first openly queer musician to perform at the Grand Old Opry. She turns pain into poetry with introspective, confessional lyrics and raw emotion with social consciousness thrown in for good measure. Albums like *Mercy Now* and *Rifles & Rosary Beads* (co-written with veterans and their families) showcase her ability to make her songs both deeply personal and universally relatable.

For those on the journey of sobriety, music can be a lifeline. Many people recovering from addiction turn to music as a coping mechanism, finding solace in lyrics that resonate with their experiences or rhythms that help them stay present in the moment. Gauthier said, "I am indeed in recovery and came to songwriting a few years after I got sober. It's been an integral part of my recovery from the beginning. I believe that the recovery process is always an ongoing thing, and for me, writing songs has given me a great way to be useful and of service."

Gauthier's partner in music and in life, Jaimee Harris has a voice that is rich and emotive, with lilting vocals that reach right in to grab the listener's heart. Wearing her trademark rose colored, heart-shaped glasses, she sings of her own dark days and recovery. Her newest album, *Boomerang Town*, is a poignant Americana album delving into themes of small-town entrapment, addiction, and loss.

For those on the journey of sobriety, music can be a lifeline. Many people recovering from addiction turn to music as a coping mechanism, finding solace in lyrics that resonate with their experiences or rhythms that help them stay present in the moment.

Songs can often feel like they offer comfort to those who are struggling for any reason. Gauthier said, "Oh yes, I hear that all the time. I believe that this is the job; I am no different than thousands of other songwriters. We put music and words to things people go through—hard things. And this is comforting to folks. It helps us know we are not alone in what we are feeling."

Peter Case performs at Green Wood Coffee House.

Beyond its benefits for mental health, social connection, and sobriety, music contributes to overall well-being in numerous ways. It has been linked to improved cognitive function, enhanced physical performance, and even pain relief. Studies have shown that stroke patients who listen to music regularly recover language and motor skills more quickly.

> "I believe that this is the job; I am no different than thousands of other songwriters. We put music and words to things people go through—hard things. And this is comforting to folks. It helps us know we are not alone in what we are feeling."
>
> —Mary Gauthier

Smaller more personal venues can enhance the experience of the audience and the performer. Gauthier said, "I like playing the small rooms because I am a troubadour, and I love the storytelling part of my show as much as I love singing the songs. Telling stories in small rooms just has a certain vibe to it that works for me. I like the intimacy."

Katie Geddes, herself a singer who performs annually at The Ark, says the Green Wood Coffee House isn't a specific place or venue. It's the music. It's renowned for hosting exceptional folk and acoustic performances in an intimate and welcoming atmosphere. Established to bring the community together through music, the series offers audiences the chance to experience live performances up close while enjoying coffee and desserts.

Sally Barris performs at Green Wood Coffee House.

Geddes was there from the beginning, back when the "First United Methodist Church was awarded the building of the defunct Glacier Way United Methodist with the stipulation that worthwhile, beneficial programming take place there. The building was soon named Green Wood, and the programming included weekly Saturday afternoon non-traditional celebration services and monthly Friday night concerts."

> "Whether helping to reduce stress, foster connections, aid in sobriety, or enhance overall well-being, music has a unique ability to touch lives in meaningful ways. By integrating music into our daily lives, individuals can harness its transformative power, finding comfort, connection, and joy in its rhythms and melodies.

"One of the things that has always struck me about the GWCH Series is that most audiences consist of as many solo attendees as parties of two or more. I am touched that folks are comfortable enjoying an evening out solo. Many people won't dine out or visit a movie theater solo, but they will come to see our performers. Also, we have so many regular attendees that friendships have developed, [between them]" Geddes observed.

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Change is inevitable. The original Green Wood location has been sold, and larger concerts are currently being held at the Dixboro United Methodist Church. The majority of concerts are now held at the 50-70-seat concert barn Geddes built in Grass Lake.

Incorporating music into daily life for healing doesn't require formal training or a deep understanding of musical theory. Simple practices can have profound effects:

- Mindful listening: Take time to fully immerse yourself in music, focusing on the instruments, lyrics, and emotions it evokes.
- Creating playlists for different moods: Curate playlists that energize, calm, or inspire you.
- Singing or playing an instrument: Even if you're not a trained musician, playing an instrument or singing can be therapeutic.
- Attending live music events: Experiencing live music can be invigorating and socially fulfilling.
- Using music for meditation and relaxation: Soft instrumental or nature-inspired music can enhance mindfulness practices.

Whether helping to reduce stress, foster connections, aid in sobriety, or enhance overall well-being, music has a unique ability to touch lives in meaningful ways. By integrating music into our daily lives, individuals can harness its transformative power, finding comfort, connection, and joy in its rhythms and melodies. In a world that can often feel chaotic, music remains a constant source of healing and harmony.

For more information about Greenwood Coffee House or any of its shows, please visit: greenwoodcoffeehouse.org. To learn more about the musicians featured in this article, visit Mary Gauthier online at marygauthier.com and Jaimee Harris at jaimeeharris.com.

Pure Levels: Tree City's Futuristic Space Funk Odyssey

Photo by Benjamin Weatherston 2012

By Cashmere Morley

In the world of independent rap, the release of an album is often the culmination of years of work, development, and growth. For the Ann Arbor hip-hop collective Tree City putting out their new album, *Pure Levels*, has been anything but a conventional journey. With a sound that Tree City dubs "futuristic space funk," the group has crafted an album that stands as both a personal testament to the 13 years it took to create and a nod to the vibrant music scene of Ann Arbor.

Tree City *Pure Levels* Cover Art by Dykehouse

For the Ann Arbor hip-hop collective Tree City, putting out their new album, Pure Levels, has been anything but a conventional journey.

From production to lyrics, the creative process for *Pure Levels* was all about experimentation and pushing boundaries. Tree City MC Kyle "Silas Green" Hunter boldly professes that, "pound for pound, this is the dopest Ann Arbor rap album to come out of all time." But at one point, he wasn't even sure if this music would see the light of day. Its road to release was marked with trials, tribulations, delays, and eventually, redemption.

Tree City started writing and recording songs together in 2005 when they formed at the original Neutral Zone location on South Main. Back then, they were just teens collaborating and sharpening their craft. There was no desire to make money or chase stardom, they simply wanted to make music together—a constant that has propelled the group to keep collaborating over the span of their young adult lives until the eventual release of *Pure Levels* nearly two decades later in December of 2024. This is their first full-length release since their debut album *Thus Far* in 2010.

"There's been a lot of membership changes, but it all started with us just freestyling in the stairwell [at high school] every day at lunch. We would just get lunch and have a little session. Bring a boombox and some of our favorite beats, and that was how we really trained each other. It was definitely like another class that we both taught and attended," said Evan "Clavius Crates" Haywood who mastered, mixed, produced, and recorded *Pure Levels*.

Tree City started writing and recording songs together in 2005 when they formed at the original Neutral Zone location on South Main. Back then, they were just teens collaborating and sharpening their craft.

Charles "Cheeks" Cheek is a Tree City MC who joined the group in 2008 and was heavily involved until his move to Washington in 2011—the same year they began to write the songs that became [the album] *Pure Levels*. He appears on several tracks throughout the album which he calls a "time capsule" of Michigan hip-hop sounds. "This is a project that has been a long time in the making, and it's something that I think demonstrates the progression of everyone as an artist. It's totally different from anything we've put out so far. I think that's a good thing because it shows that we are growing and evolving as human beings as well as artists."

In the fall of 2024, Haywood reached out to the other members of Tree City, and the group began discussing how and when to release the album on his record label, Black Ram Sound. "It felt a little strange at first," Hunter admitted. "I was worried that listening to it again would be a disappointment. But once I listened to the final version, I knew that people needed to hear it," he said. "I just listened to it again for the first time in a while last night, and I'm really proud of the sequencing [of the album]" said Hunter. "I would say if people want to approach it like a double album, even though it's all digital or streaming, from *Boss Triangles* to *1975* is the 'party side.' And then the next half is the 'rap side.'"

Haywood says the diverse and complex Ann Arbor music community helped mold the sound on *Pure Levels*. "Being surrounded by such an elite community of artists… Ann Arbor is rich with all kinds of different sounds. The mash up of influences that are on this album definitely come from an Ann Arbor perspective." One of those influences, producer Michael Dykehouse, shared some beats he was working on with Haywood in 2011 while they both worked at Encore Records. It ended up changing the direction of the group's sound in a major way.

"It felt a little strange at first. I was worried that listening to it again would be a disappointment..."

—Kyle Hunter

Simmons, a Tree City MC and DJ who played a major role on *Pure Levels* said, "I feel really lucky, blessed, and grateful to be able to work with the people that I do because they have such a unique perspective, and they understand that you don't have to appeal to certain people. You don't have to write certain flows; you don't have to say things a certain kind of way. You can really do the kind of stuff you want to do and still be successful. And that's something that I really stand behind."

What *did* the group want to do? This was a question they all seemed to ask themselves during the making of *Pure Levels*. In terms of vocal technique, Hunter pushed himself to experiment, moving away from the typical aggressive tone often found in underground rap. "I tried to use my voice in a more melodic way," he said. "I wanted to have a voice that was compelling especially when addressing topics like sex, relationships, and the funnier aspects of life. It had to be more than just monotonous."

Clavius and Gen Pop

2013 Photo by Cy Abdelnour

Haywood said he did a lot of experimenting with the mixing on this record including all-night sessions where he was, "recording with the worst mic I had onto a cassette, and then taking that and putting it into the computer and doing more to it. A lot of phasing and flanging and reverb to give it that futuristic sound—but always maintaining clarity and solidity, so that it doesn't become mush. I wanted to keep [the mixing] tight but still have texture and space to it."

"Ann Arbor is rich with all kinds of different sounds. The mash up of influences that are on this album definitely come from an Ann Arbor perspective."

—Evan Haywood

2013 Photo by Cy Abdelnour

Simmons said that he feels the band kept making music together after all these years for their own separate reasons, but for him, what kept him coming back was exploring new "sounds, styles, and flows; really seeing how far we can take [the music]."

The personal nature of the lyrics is another standout feature of *Pure Levels*. For Hunter, much of the writing process was about reflecting on real-life experiences. "We didn't have to embellish," said Hunter. "The stories were already dramatic enough." Evident in tracks like "1975," which captures the emotions surrounding the end of a relationship, Hunter explained, "[That track] was literally just me and Evan sitting down and giving a play-by-play of a post-breakup. Things were not clicking anymore, and we were just honest about how we were feeling at that point in time."

Tree City's decision to keep the lyrics real and relatable was part of a conscious effort to break away from the typical posturing in rap music. Simmons noted that the lyrics he contributed to the album are "very personal" especially on the second to last track, "Mama Says Education."

"I had this verse where I'm depicting my situation growing up as a dark-skinned black man and growing up around other black kids who kind of have this mental construct where they don't value themselves, and because of that, they lash out on other people that look like them, myself being one of those people. And I have a whole verse talking about how growing up was tough because I got picked on a lot as a kid just from being dark skinned, and it was like you don't even realize how you're affecting yourself, how you're affecting me, and how deep rooted this construct is. This self-hatred that's embedded in young minds at a very young age. One of the lines I say, 'Ignorance is really bliss when racism occurs / Now you got a bunch of black sheep that just follow the herd / Who

Pure Levels: Tree City's Futuristic Space Funk Odyssey

couldn't tell you where his daddy is or where he works. / And it hurts my heart, but the struggle's been part of the puzzle / And we've been in this together right from the start.' And that, to me, was really putting firsthand experiences on record."

Simmons said that he feels the band kept making music together after all these years for their own separate reasons, but for him, what kept him coming back was exploring new "sounds, styles, and flows; really seeing how far we can take [the music]."

Hunter agreed that there were many aspects keeping the band together, from their recreational drug use to their deep love of music, and says he hopes to continue to "nerd out" to music with his fellow bandmates in the future.

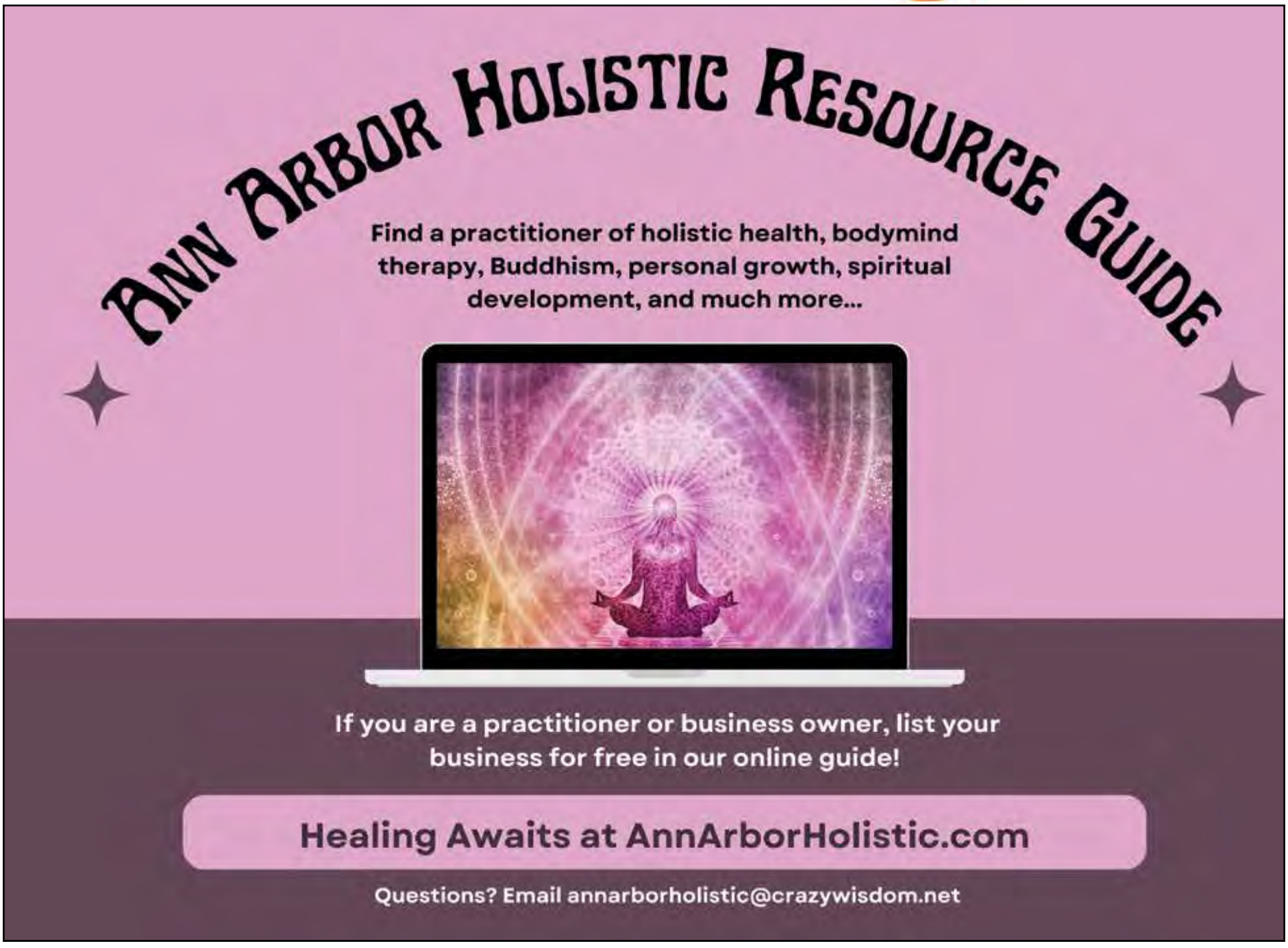
"I think the internet and social media kept us connected to a certain extent," said Cheek. "We were all in separate places in our lives." He noted that he is a mental health professional and has been in the field for five years. Musically, he is currently working with a different group, but in the future hopes to record new music with both Tree City and his current band, Breath Easy Music Group.

Right now, Simmons deejays and works as a sales representative for Comcast, but plans to keep making music with Tree City and notes that there is a lot of music they still need to release. "I love being able to experiment with different ideas and concepts, being able to record them.Just venting and expressing myself in general is a great outlet for me," he said. "Right now, I'm putting time into learning to play more guitar, and working on a few solo projects; I really want to do more collabs in the future as well and just continue to put out more records."

Haywood says that he still lives in Ann Arbor, where he runs Black Ram Treehouse recording studio and Black Ram Sound record label, where he records, mixes, and masters work for artists from Michigan and many other places.

"My aim is to help musicians realize their creative visions with top-shelf sound quality and attention to detail. Since 2016, I have released several solo albums under my own name, Evan Haywood. These LP's cover many styles from folk to funk. I have carried Tree City's relentless work ethic and taste for experimental sounds into my solo work… [*Pure Levels]* is the most fun, danceable, complex, and meaningful music Tree City has ever created as a group. It definitely rewards repeated listening… *Pure Levels* is one of those records that sinks a little deeper into your subconscious mind every time you listen to it. We hope our fans will enjoy it for many years to come."

Looking into the future, Tree City is booking live shows for the summertime. To keep up with the group on social media, visit their label on Instagram at @blackramsound and listen to them on Bandcamp at https://treecity734.bandcamp.com.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Food & Nutrition Section

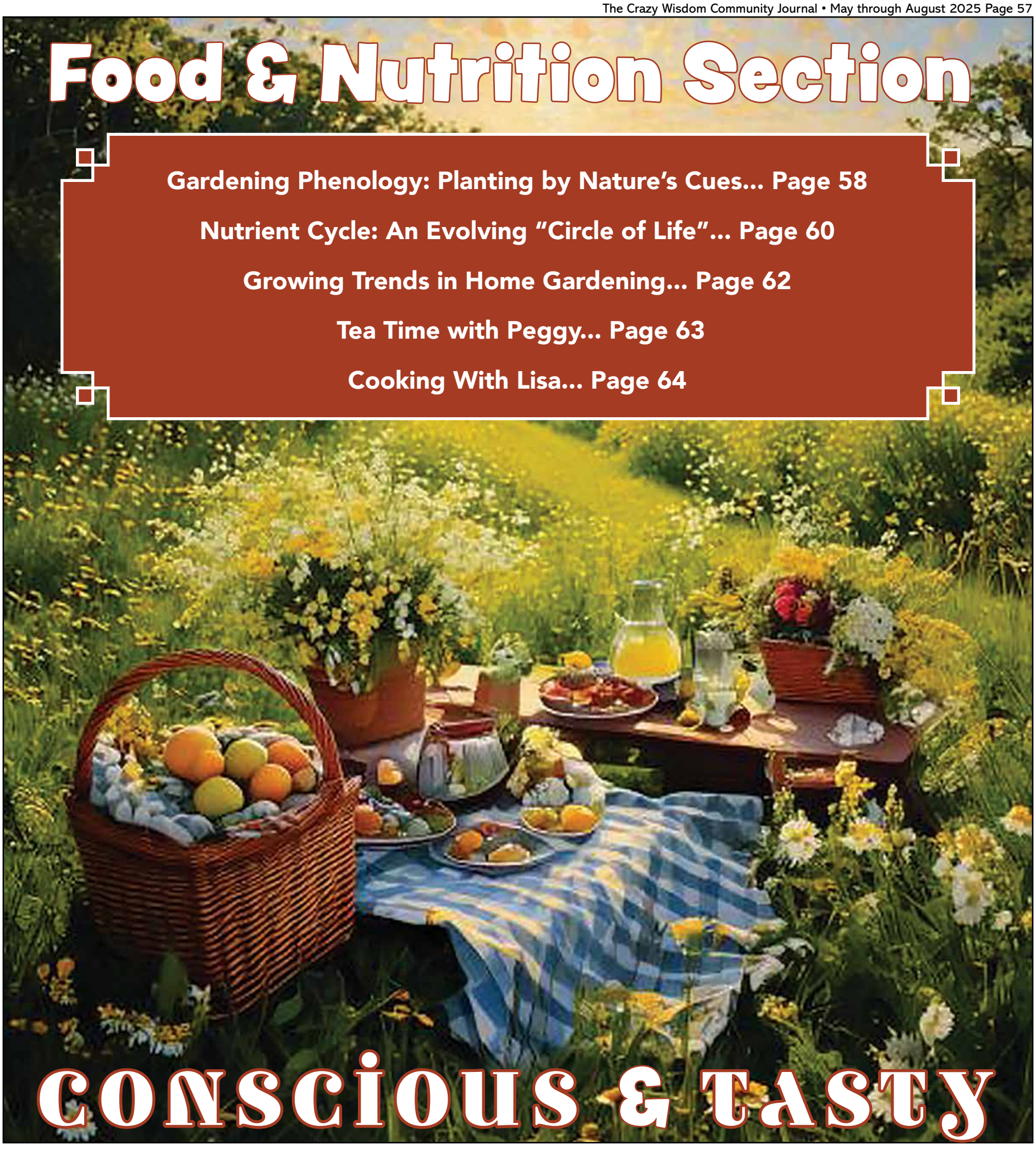
Gardening Phenology: Planting by Nature's Cues... Page 58

Nutrient Cycle: An Evolving "Circle of Life"... Page 60

Growing Trends in Home Gardening... Page 62

Tea Time with Peggy... Page 63

Cooking With Lisa... Page 64



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GARDENING PHENOLOGY:
Planting by Nature's Cues

Story and Illustrations by Karen Quinn

As a gardener, and a general nature romantic, my heart begins to feel torn around mid-February. On one half, I want to honor the last of winter's deep rest and on the other half, there is the burgeoning energy of spring's return. One of my favorite activities at this time is to thumb through my seed stores, as well as the new year's seed catalogs, and begin to plan my garden in earnest.

One of my favorite activities at this time is to thumb through my seed stores, as well as the new year's seed catalogs, and begin to plan my garden in earnest.

As February gives way to March, and the spring fever really sets in, many of us start to read the back of our seed packages to see when we can start indoor seeds or even plant hearty early spring crops. But the packages can be vague in their timing reference, and even "projected" last frost dates are no more than speculation, causing us to weigh out planting too soon–or even too late. What's a gardening enthusiast to do?

Over the decades, I have somewhat started divorcing my process from the clinical, "back of the package" style of gardening and instead turned to nature for my guidance through the use of phenology. Technically speaking, phenology is the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena in relation to climate and nature. It helps us take the measure of air and soil temperature, as well as sunlight and frost danger, and all you have to do is observe the plants and animals in your own yard. Simply watch for your "firsts" to start getting the lay of your own little ecosystem. First buds, first blooms, first animal and bird migrations, first insects, first hibernating animals and amphibians awakening. These are your indicators that certain environmental benchmarks have been met, then look to phenology to see what to plant when. It's as easy as that.

One of my favorite phenological firsts always clears up the confusion for the age-old misunderstood question, "When do I plant my peas?" I've overheard folks rattle off everywhere from late January to Mid-February, which of course isn't going to work since the permafrost is still intact and the ground is still completely frozen! But someone on some random social media site said it, so they believe that it must be true. I'm here to let you in on a little secret, dear reader. If you lean into the knowledge of farmers long past, you'll turn your attention to nature for her cue. When you see forsythia in bloom, it is safe to plant your peas, as well as onion and lettuce. Even if you don't have forsythia in your own yard, I bet there is some in your neighborhood.

Over the decades, I have somewhat started divorcing my process from the clinical, "back of the package" style of gardening and instead turned to nature for my guidance through the use of phenology.

A few more of my favorite firsts are to look for the crocus blooms to help me know it's time to plant radishes, parsnips, and spinach. When my fence line daffodils blossom, I plant beets and carrots. Potatoes can be planted with the blooming of dandelions. Apple blossoms are the indicator for planting bush beans and when the blossoms fall, plant pole beans and cucumbers. When my lilacs are in full bloom, I know I can plant my annual flowers, as well as squash. Perennial plants can go in the ground when the maple trees begin leafing out. Beneath my maple tree, I have lily-of-the-valley. When they are in full bloom, I know it's time to move my tomato transplants to the garden. The blossoms of the bearded irises along the riverbed are indicators to transplant my peppers and eggplants. Then when the peonies bloom, I can plant all the heat-loving seeds, such as melons and corn.

One of my favorite phenological firsts always clears up the confusion for the age-old misunderstood question, "When do I plant my peas?"

These are only a few tips off of the laundry list of indicators that phenology can offer you. I encourage you to do some research, watch nature, and get more in tune with your own environment. I guarantee you will be happy with your gardening results. One of my favorite references is found through the *Old Farmer's Almanac* (OFA), they have an extensive list for every climate and even give suggestions for indoor seed starting based on phenology as well.

My other go-to is through MSU. This is far more in depth, and they correlate Growing Degree Days (GDD) to help you plan for pests, molds, and viruses. This helps you know when to treat plants or release garden allies for preventative maintenance. In addition to all these helpful indicators, it can also tell you how long you have left in the season, so you know when to put your garden to bed for the winter as well.

My final suggestion comes in the form of a little homework. This year, if you aren't already in the practice of this, I encourage you to keep a garden journal. In addition to writing what you plant and when you plant it, you could also include each "first" you see and date it. Then, you have this to look back on the next year as an indicator of when to start expecting your garden's firsts! I've been keeping a garden journal for over 20 years, and I keep track of everything. From the first forsythia blooms to the weather, when I fed certain plants, and when I turned the compost. Creating a map of the past helps you predict the future.

Karen Quinn is a writer and artist who homesteads on a rural urban farm in Livonia, Michigan with her husband, son, and menagerie of animals. Her favorite things are reading, exploring, and drinking tea.

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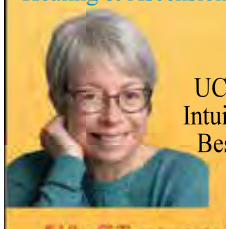

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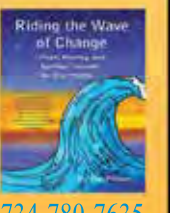

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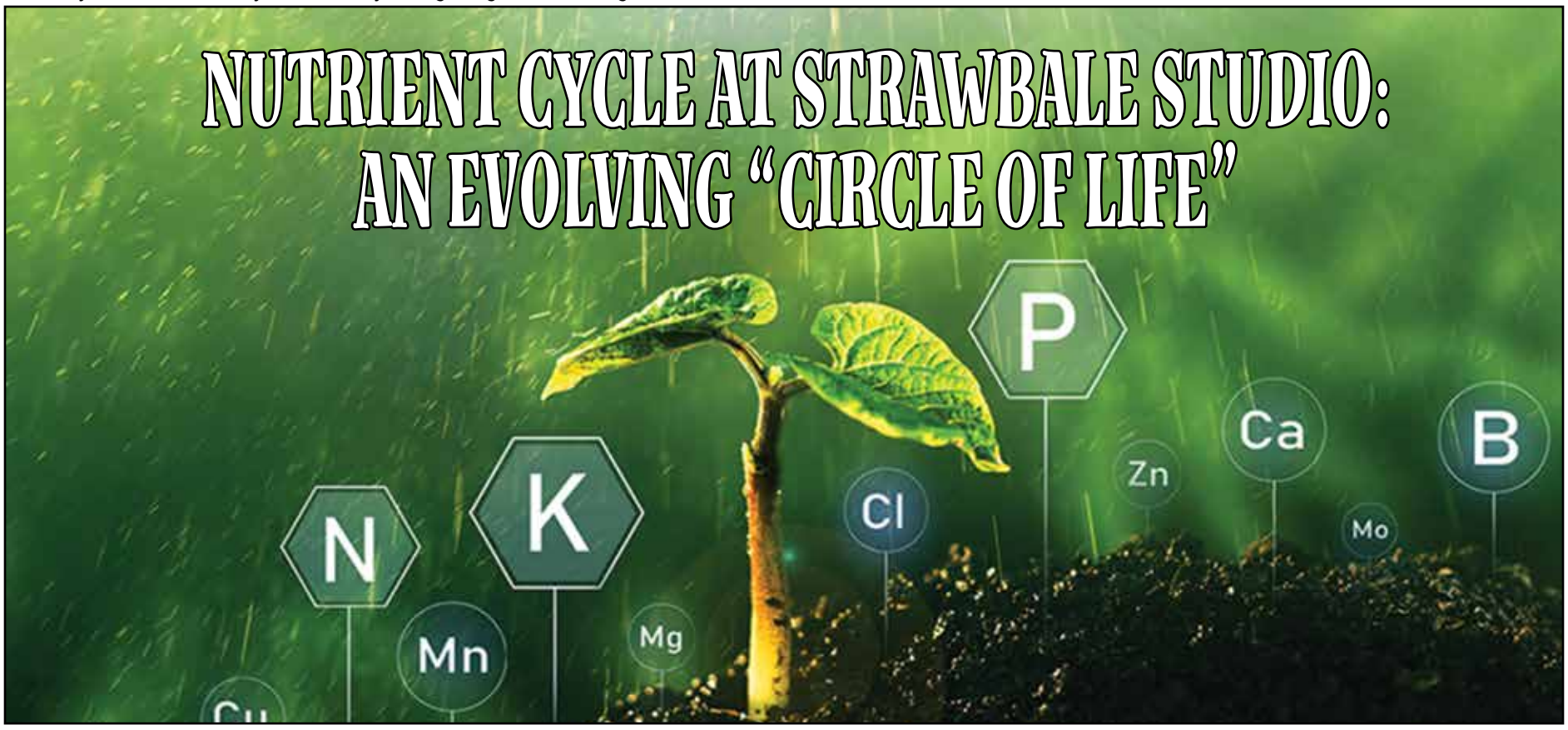
NUTRIENT CYCLE AT STRAWBALE STUDIO: AN EVOLVING "CIRCLE OF LIFE"



By Deanne Bednar

The Strawbale Studio is a building on land one hour north of Detroit. The studio runs programs that teach natural building and sustainable living skills to youth and adults, both on and off-site. It all started in 1996, when I retired from teaching art and "sustainable futures" classes at the middle school level and enthusiastically took a natural building course from the Cob Cottage Company on the west coast. When I returned to Michigan, I visited some friends, John Hartom, Lisa Blackburn, and Hartom's sister Fran Lee. Lee wanted to have an outbuilding on her land "that felt like a hug," based on a book she read called *Places for the Soul*. We, with the help of many, set out on that journey to create the Strawbale Studio, with strawbale walls, earthen plasters, and a thatched roof. In 2023, Lee moved on, and I bought the land and moved in. Although natural building was the focus, explorations were also made into gardening, foraging, and nutrient recycling over the last 20 years including various forms of composting, biochar, hugelkultur or "Hugel Culture," compost furnaces, mushroom log inoculation, and more.

YOU MIGHT GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR GARDENING FRIENDS AND START AN "IDEA MAP" OF THE VARIOUS NATURAL RESOURCES ON YOUR SITE OR COMMUNITY GARDEN, AND IN YOUR REGION, AND HOW THEY COULD BE RETURNED TO THE CIRCLE OF LIFE!

There are many ways nutrient recycling is implemented at Strawbale Studio that can be used in your home garden. You might even get together with your gardening friends and start an "idea map" of the various natural resources on your site or community garden, and in your region, and how they could be returned to the circle of life!

Food to Food and Composting

Keep nutrients in the kitchen. Food from the kitchen can stay in the kitchen! When chopping vegetables, collect scraps such as onion skins or vegetable leaves and stalks and freeze or dehydrate them for future soup stock. This saves

FOOD FROM THE KITCHEN CAN STAY IN THE KITCHEN! WHEN CHOPPING VEGETABLES, COLLECT SCRAPS SUCH AS ONION SKINS OR VEGETABLE LEAVES AND STALKS AND FREEZE OR DEHYDRATE THEM FOR FUTURE SOUP STOCK.

nutrients and flavor. Yum! The next level of nutrient extraction for food waste is composting. Composting is a great way to create nutrients to amend our garden beds. I use an outdoor pallet composter and an indoor worm composting unit.

Outdoors, seven pallets are staked upright for stability and wired together to make three bays. I have a "current pile" to which I add food scraps, covering each "deposit" with mulched leaves from a neighbor (another form of nutrient recycling). I am also integrating biochar into one compost bay (more on biochar later). About 1/4 of the food scraps stay indoors in a three-tier worm composter purchased about 30 years ago...complete with one pound of Red Wiggler (eisenia fetida) top-feeding worms from a tropical climate. It is tucked away in the corner of my kitchen, quite unknown to most who visit here, as there is no smell. The worm castings (poop from many generations of worms) are rich soil that I add to my garden beds. I also use diluted leachate (liquid from the composter) as a fertilizer if it smells sweet, and not anaerobic. A worm composter meets needs for ease, especially in the winter—you don't have to walk outside to the pallet composters, and the house warmth biodegrades the food scraps more quickly.

A WORM COMPOSTER MEETS NEEDS FOR EASE, ESPECIALLY IN THE WINTER—YOU DON'T HAVE TO WALK OUTSIDE TO THE PALLET COMPOSTERS, AND THE HOUSE WARMTH BIODEGRADES THE FOOD SCRAPS MORE QUICKLY.

Leaves as a Nutrient Source

In the fall I don't rake or collect leaves from the lawn. It is my understanding through research that even oak leaves, (though they contain tannic acid) if left on the ground, provide soil amendment when they are broken down by mowing. The acidity of oak leaves breaks down as they decompose. I do rake accumulated piles of leaves away from buildings and paths and sometimes transport them to a place where I want to suppress plant growth by piling them deeply. I also bring home leaves from a neighbor who mows, mulches, and bags his maple leaves. The mulched leaves stay put and don't blow around, which is perfect for me to mulch gardens, improve the soil, and also create soil on living roofs of small structures at Strawbale. Roof soil is created in time by layering "found" natural materials on hand over a pond liner membrane on a shallow pitch roof.

HUGEL CULTURE IS A GARDEN MOUND MADE BY LAYERING WOOD AND BRUSH AND COVERED WITH SOIL. THIS STRATEGY MAKES USE OF BRUSH PILES, WHILE CREATING A SOIL MEDIUM/GARDEN AREA THAT HOLDS MOISTURE AND SLOWLY RELEASES NUTRIENTS, WHILE CREATING A WARM MICRO-CLIMATE FROM THE DECOMPOSITION PROCESS.

Some living roof materials I use which biodegrade to soil and support plant growth are old straw (usually separated into flakes), decomposing wood (a substitute for peat dredged from wetlands/ peat bogs), horse manure (fresh or decayed), and "lawn mower-mulched" leaves. Then I top it all off with some soil that is rich in microorganisms that help decompose the above natural materials to soil for plants such as sedum and wild geranium!

Hugel Culture is a garden mound made by layering wood and brush and covered with soil. This strategy makes use of brush piles, while creating a soil medium/ garden area that holds moisture and slowly releases nutrients, while creating a warm micro-climate from the decomposition process. It takes quite a lot of energy and time to make it if it is dug down into the ground. It may be more suited to those who have access to machinery for deep digging and filling. On the plus side, the mound can also be useful for water retention, water diversion on a slope, or to create some definition/privacy on a site.

THE BIOCHAR IDEALLY IS CRUSHED TO RICE SIZE AND WILL HOLD WATER WITHIN THE SMALL CHANNELS IN THE WOOD. LIKE A CORAL REEF "HOTEL," THE CHARCOAL HOSTS SOIL MICROORGANISMS.

And Then There Is Biochar

Karl and Gaylyn Kaufman, visionaries seeking to form an Ecovillage here in Michigan, led two biochar workshops at Strawbale Studio. This is another way to use miscellaneous wood and sticks. A cone-shaped pit was dug about five feet across the top and tapered in as it reached three feet deep. Then a small stick fire was started in the bottom of the pit. When this small fire begins to show a bit of white ash, another layer of sticks is laid on top of the first fire. This creates a controlled burn that produces charcoal by suppressing oxygen to the layers below. The second layer prevents the first layer (now charcoal sticks) from burning down to ash. When the second burn layer begins to ash a bit, a third layer of sticks is covered, preventing the second layer from burning down to ash. The process is complete when the pit is filled with charcoal layers. The fire is then extinguished with many five-gallon buckets of water that are staged at the site, to quickly and thoroughly stop the burn, and keep the charcoal from burning to ashes. The biochar ideally is crushed to rice size and will hold water within the small channels in the wood. Like a coral reef "hotel," the charcoal hosts soil microorganisms. This is another way to utilize miscellaneous wood while enriching the soil and sequestering carbon for hundreds of years. (Wood left in nature would degrade over several years, releasing its carbon to the air.) The biochar needs to be "charged up" with nitrogen over some months by moving it into a compost pile or by inoculating it with urine. There are two great YouTube videos to learn more about making Biochar: youtube.com/watch?v=ROgHuYMfyoU and youtube.com/watch?v=kMXgVxO9r_g.

THE DECOMPOSITION PROCESS OF THE WOOD CHIPS AND MANURE CHEMICALLY PRODUCES HEAT OF 120+ DEGREES. 110-DEGREE WATER IS BEING DELIVERED BY THIS THERMOSYPHONING PROCESS FROM THE OUTDOOR COMPOSTING PILE PIPES TO A 30-GALLON DRUM WITH A SPIGOT LOCATED IN THE HOUSE.

What about creating heat (and soil) from the decomposition process? Gaelyn Brown wrote the book *Compost Furnace* based on the work of Jean Paine, a Frenchman who, in the 1950s, provided heat from the decomposition of a 50-yard biomass pile (sawdust, woodchips, and manure) to heat his family household domestic hot water and in-floor radiant heating. Additionally, the pile kept a tank of manure warm, which produced methane gas for cooking.

I hired Brown to design the outdoor aspect of the compost furnace to heat the earth floor in the Strawbale Studio. Our compost pile was 20 feet wide by 15 feet long by 7 feet high, bounded by old hay bales and filled with 50 yards of biomass (sawdust, woodchips, and 10% composted horse manure). Pex tubes in the pile were connected in a closed loop to the indoor Pex tubes embedded in the Strawbale Studio floor. Food-grade propylene glycol protected the water pipes from freezing. A pump circulated the water. An expansion tank controlled the pressure in the closed system and thermometers show the temperatures at various points indoors.

This compost furnace pile went up to 140 degrees in a week and stayed at 140 for a year as measured by our probe thermometer. Unfortunately, the Strawbale Studio is a tall space with lots of interior mass. So, while the compost furnace didn't heat the studio adequately, I am convinced the system would have worked to heat a small, well-insulated building. Or it may have worked better if we had put more money into an automated system that would circulate the heat based on temperatures. We did end up with many yards of wonderful rich soil as the pile decomposed.

In November 2024, natural builder and homesteader, Rich Points of Beaverton, Michigan, constructed a compost hot water experiment at his place, that did work. I contributed to the design and beginning construction process, and he finished the pile, plumbing, and monitoring. Point's composting hot water heater is 15 feet wide by 15 feet long by 6 feet tall pile of wood chips and manure, bounded by straw bales for containment and insulation. Pipes are laid in loops inside the pile. Cold water from the house enters the pipes at the bottom of the pile and loops upward. The decomposition process of the wood chips and manure chemically produces heat of 120+ degrees. 110-degree water is being delivered by this thermosyphoning process from the outdoor composting pile pipes to a 30-gallon drum with a spigot located in the house. It is expected to continue to heat the water in the pipes that run through the pile for up to a year. At that point, the pile will have finished decomposing to become rich soil for gardens, and a new pile will need to be built to heat the water.

These are just some nutrient cycle possibilities. What would your list of local resources look like? How could the nutrients complete their cycle and be of use? Piece by piece we can bring together the people needed to envision and implement these circles of life systems.

Deanne Bednar is the coordinator and teacher at Strawbale Studio outside of Oxford, MI. She studied with the Cob Cottage company in 1996. This experience led to the collaborative construction of the Strawbale Studio. Bednar is the illustrator for The Cobber's Companion, The Hand-Sculpted House, *and* The Natural Plaster Book. *She loves to forage and is currently teaching classes in natural building as well as sustainable skills that use natural materials, such as spoon carving, earth oven, and candle-making. Visit the Strawbale Studio online at strawbalestudio.org, or reach out to Bednar directly at ecoartdb@gmail.com, or (248) 496-4088.*

Growing Trends in Home Gardening

By Crysta Coburn

Going green has been a catch phrase for several years now. People are increasingly looking for ways to live more sustainably and be in better touch with the natural environment. Forest bathing, or immersing oneself in nature, is a growing trend here in the Midwest. Per the American Psychological Association, numerous studies have shown both physical and cognitive benefits to connecting with nature. This includes sharpening attention spans as well as lowering blood pressure, heart rate, and stress.

Despite the obvious boost to our health, spending time in a forest, meadow, or by a lakeside can be difficult. For some, access, transportation, and free time may be limited.

Despite the obvious boost to our health, spending time in a forest, meadow, or by a lakeside can be difficult. For some, access, transportation, and free time may be limited. But you don't need to get away to immerse yourself in the outdoors, as many have discovered since the dawn of the 2020s. Staying home, enjoying time on a porch, patio, or in your own backyard also has benefits, and more and more people are taking advantage.

The early years of the decade "certainly saw an inordinate increase in consumers' interest in gardening, cooking at home both indoors and BBQ, as well as investing in outdoor furnishings," said Kelly Vore, owner of Downtown Home and Garden in Ann Arbor. One of the recent changes enduring in modern gardening is "the emphasis on container gardening for small spaces: balconies, small homes, and raised beds to optimize soil structure," she said. "Organic practices and the products (fertilizers, soils, seeds, and plants) that support them are on the rise."

Another trend that has been on the rise is an increased interest in local ecosystems and native plants.

Rosina Newton, of New Earth Home and Garden, pointed out important benefits of container gardening and raised beds such as "more accessibility for those with mobility issues" and "for those who have contaminated soils." Of course, there are some drawbacks, Newton said, like being "limited to plants that will grow successfully in a container" and a potential "greater expense for the materials."

Another trend that has been on the rise is an increased interest in local ecosystems and native plants. Said Newton, "The trends that I see that are the most important are all related to ecological gardening. This includes organic gardening, permaculture, regenerative agriculture, gardening for wildlife habitat, and green stormwater infrastructure."

In response to these interests, Downtown Home and Garden has "expanded our local plant vendors and added Michigan native choices," said Vore. Planting native wildflowers, such as Black- and Brown-eyed Susans, Coneflowers, and Milkweed (Michigan has several native varieties), offers food to pollinators and attracts beautiful butterflies to your yard or balcony. Monarch butterflies, for instance, rely on Milkweed both as food and as a place to lay their eggs. It is also the only plant that monarch caterpillars can eat.

An increasing number of homeowners are choosing to replace their grassy green lawns with flowers , such as Bugleweed and Blue Star Creeper. According to Greg Pizzino, operations manager at English Gardens in Plymouth, "Microclover is popular [and] is the only one you'll easily find in seed, making it the most economical." Not only is choosing native plants and flowers a terrific way to bring more nature into your life, but it is often more economical, saving on water costs, weeding, and overall care. Relax to the bright colors and sweet aromas of the flowers, the gentle buzzing of the bees, the tranquil calling of the birds, all while saving yourself time and money.

Meadow gardens are made to look wild like a meadow, though they are often carefully planned by their gardeners. They include native plants, such as Cornflowers, Poppies, and Baby's Breath, as well as grasses like Brown Fox Sedge and Sweet Grass.

If you are specifically trying to attract wildlife, there are a few different garden styles to choose from that have become popular. Meadow gardens are made to look wild like a meadow, though they are often carefully planned by their gardeners. They include native plants, such as Cornflowers, Poppies, and Baby's Breath, as well as grasses like Brown Fox Sedge and Sweet Grass. Bees, butterflies, birds, and even some small animals thrive in meadow gardens. Pollinator gardens use many of the same plants, but they are not necessarily intended to look as unmanaged as meadow gardens.

For those with allergies, which is a lot of us in Michigan, a moss garden might be a better choice than a flower garden. Many different mosses grow well in Michigan. Sheet moss, also known as feather moss, has a carpet-like texture and prefers acidic soil. While the popular groundcovers, Irish moss and Scotch moss do have moss in their names, they are in fact members of the carnation family, though they do have a moss-like appearance. Ask your local garden store about which moss (or moss lookalike) would work best for your goals as well as the type of soil you have in your yard.

Of course, taking a leisurely stroll or stretching out on the warm earth are both lovely activities to indulge in. But let's say you want to sit on something other

than the ground and enjoy time outdoors with your friends and family (another trending activity). As an extension of your living space, the backyard oasis is the place to be with outdoor furniture, hammocks, and maybe a fire pit, in-ground or raised, or water feature.

If you don't have access to a yard, you aren't left out in the cold. Patios, decks, and balconies can also be decorated for nature, and the gardening industry has responded to this increase in interest. A great number of native flowers and herbs grow easily in pots, which can be works of art on their own. For those concerned with supporting their local economy, seeds as well as pottery can be obtained from local shops and artisans.

Edible landscaping, or foodscaping, is a more modern way of achieving the best of both worlds, a garden that is both a pleasant place to hang out as well as a source of nutrition.

Said Vore, "We have an extensive selection of fresh new items from Echo Valley (an Ann Arbor company) that makes the very best in beautiful garden decor, from gazing globes to tabletop fireplaces. Something for everyone."

A unique way to add privacy to your outdoor spaces is by constructing a living fence. By building a fence using living plants, you add color, aroma, and interest to your space. A simple row of hedges or shrubs could do the job just fine. However, these are far from the only options. A lattice has the potential to support a number of climbing plants such as Morning Glories, Sweet Pea, and Wisteria. As people continue to take advantage of outdoor spaces, living fences will undoubtedly continue to grow in popularity.

The early 2020s also showed an increase in edible gardens, or gardens containing fruits, berries, vegetables, herbs, and other edible plants. Edible landscaping, or foodscaping, is a more modern way of achieving the best of both worlds, a garden that is both a pleasant place to hang out as well as a source of nutrition. There is a distinct feeling of satisfaction in growing one's own food. And depending on how agriculture goes this year, foodscaping may become an important component of the average home.

So many attractive edible plants grow well in Michigan! Swiss chard has large green leaves and colorful stems. Rhubarb is another leafy green plant with gorgeous stalks that come in shades from light pink to deep scarlet. Curly parsley has ruffled leaves that add both color and texture to a landscape. Fruit trees produce beautiful blossoms in the spring, and chives make lovely purple pom-pom-like flowers if they are allowed to bloom. Remember the living fence we mentioned earlier? Why not try growing grapes or tomatoes on that trellis instead of Morning Glories? (Although some morning glory varieties are, in fact, edible.)

Some key takeaways for modern gardeners that Newton suggested are:

- Learn more about sustainable, ecological landscaping
- Reduce and/or eliminate lawns
- Use organic, sustainable methods and materials
- Plant appropriate native plants, which replenish habitat for endangered insects, pollinators, birds, and other wildlife
- Use green stormwater infrastructure design (e.g. rain gardens and native plants) to reduce rainwater runoff that causes pollution, flooding, and erosion in our watersheds (see Newton's article on protecting out watersheds on page XX.)

We hope this article has shown you some of the new and exciting opportunities in the gardening world and offered inspiration for your own nature-filled sanctuary. The world of gardening is wide open and full of colors, scents, sounds, and flavors that invite your mind and your heart to explore and get creative.

Tea with Peggy

Minty Cool

By P.A. Alaniz

When I think of mint, winter comes to mind—a nice cup of cocoa in which I steep some peppermint tea leaves. It's invigorating, refreshing, and cooling. Wait a minute... if mint is invigorating, refreshing, and cooling, why am I drinking it in the cold of winter? I should be drinking in the warmth of summer instead! There is a reason that all of our southern neighbors and middle eastern friends drink lots of mint tea. They do so to be refreshed in the scorching summer sun. While mint tea is a tisane, or herbal infusion, it is naturally caffeine free and great for people who need to limit their caffeine intake. It can be combined with a true tea such as black or green if you want a little more pep than just the refreshing menthol.

There are many different varieties of mint and all of them can be added to water to make a hydrating iced beverage. Easy to find types of mint tea and blends are peppermint, spearmint, chocolate, apple, pineapple, Moroccan, lavender, orange mint, lemon balm, and basil. Mint also has many health benefits attributed to it. People drink mint to help with digestive issues such as a fatty liver or irritable bowel syndrome. It is not, however, recommended for individuals with GERD, and you should check to see if it will interact with any medications you are taking.

Peppermint helps with headaches and pain relief in general and is good for the memory. Try studying while drinking a cup of peppermint tea or making a list of things you need to do. Drinking it in the summer can help with hydration as well as provide your body with a burst of coolness on a hot day. Mint also combines well with many other herbal and natural ingredients such as lemon, cucumber, blueberry, and strawberries. Instead of that cup of cocoa you have in winter, try combining it with seltzer or mineral water for a nice summer tea cocktail. By the way, it is paired well with rum, vodka, and bourbon, too. Mint is one of the easiest herbs to grow, whether in the garden or in a pot on your back patio, and it's easy to make your own homemade tea blends. For summertime, I suggest you add muddled mint to your water along with some fresh lemons or cucumber slices for a cold brew infused tea. If you don't have a mortar and pestle you can simply smash the mint with a rolling pin to release the aromatics into the water. If you want a revitalizing summer cocktail with mint, I suggest a mint limoncello spritzer.

Mint Limoncello Spritzer

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons of mint, muddled
- 2 cups of hot water
- 2 cups of cane sugar
- 1/4 cup of limoncello
- 1 shot of vodka
- 1 cup of club soda
- 1 ice cube tray
- 1 lemon slice for garnish

In order to make this drink, you will need to create a simple syrup with the mint tea by muddling two tablespoons of fresh mint. Add the mint to two cups of boiling water, then add two cups of cane sugar. Stir until the sugar is dissolved. Strain and cool the mixture. Once it is cooled, you can pour into the ice cube trays and freeze. Once frozen you can put the cubes into an airtight container and store for up to three months. Because of the sugar content the ice cubes will be a little soft.

To make the cocktail, add up to a half of a cup of the ice cubes to a quarter cup of limoncello, 1 shot of vodka, and a cup of club soda. Depending upon your taste buds, you can add less of the ice cubes and more of the club soda to have less of an intense mint experience. Garnish with a slice of fresh lemon, drink and enjoy.

P.A. Alaniz is a writer and poet. She is a graduate of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. She has been published by Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Wonderful Wacky Family *and has a tea travel blog: Tea, Travel, and Spirits.*

Cooking with Lisa

By Lisa Viger-Gotte

This sandwich is a celebration of simple ingredients coming together in the most satisfying way…a little moment of deliciousness—one that feels both nourishing and delightfully familiar.

Chickpea Salad Sandwich with Dill & Celery

Some recipes feel like old friends—familiar, comforting, and always welcome at the table. This tasty chickpea salad sandwich is a plant-based take on a classic featuring mashed chickpeas, crisp celery, and fragrant dill, all brought together with a tangy, lemony dressing that's made even creamier with a bit of avocado. It's hearty and fresh and perfect for warmer days.

Ingredients (makes 3 to 4 sandwiches):

- 1 can (15 oz) chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 Tablespoons vegan mayo or tahini
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ½ ripe avocado, mashed
- Juice of ½ lemon
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup (optional, for balance)
- 2 ribs celery, finely diced
- 2 Tablespoons fresh dill, chopped
- 2 Tablespoons onion, finely diced
- Crusty bread
- 1 cup leafy greens or sprouts (such as lettuce, arugula, or baby spinach)

Instructions:

Mash the chickpeas: In a large bowl, mash the chickpeas with a fork or potato masher until mostly broken down but still slightly chunky.

Mix the salad: Stir in the vegan mayo, Dijon mustard, lemon juice, salt, black pepper, garlic powder, and maple syrup. Mix well to combine.

Add the crunch: Fold in the diced celery, fresh dill, and red onion, ensuring everything is evenly coated. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.

Assemble the sandwiches: Lay out the bread slices and add a generous amount of the chickpea salad. Add your choice of greens or sprouts.

Serve and enjoy: Top with the remaining bread slices, slice in half, and serve immediately. If making ahead, store the chickpea salad in an airtight container in the fridge for up to three days.

Herbed Polenta with Roasted Spring Vegetables

The base of this dish is rustic and hearty cornmeal, slowly simmered into creamy, rich, and comforting goodness. Paired with vibrant roasted spring vegetables, it celebrates the season's freshest offerings. Sweet asparagus, tender zucchini, and juicy cherry tomatoes take on a slight caramelization in the oven, their flavors intensified by a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of sea salt. Nestled atop a bed of silky, herbed polenta, this meal is both rustic and refined, a simple yet satisfying way to savor the lightness of spring.

Ingredients (serves 4):
For the Polenta:

- 4 cups vegetable broth (or water)
- 1 cup coarse cornmeal (polenta)
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil or vegan butter
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 Tablespoons fresh basil, chopped
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast (for a subtle cheesy flavor)
- For the Roasted Vegetables:
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and cut into thirds
- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ cup red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)

Instructions:

Prepare the vegetables: Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. In a large bowl, toss the asparagus, zucchini, cherry tomatoes, and red onion with olive oil, salt, pepper, and balsamic vinegar. Spread evenly on the baking sheet and roast for 20-25 minutes, stirring once, until tender and lightly caramelized.

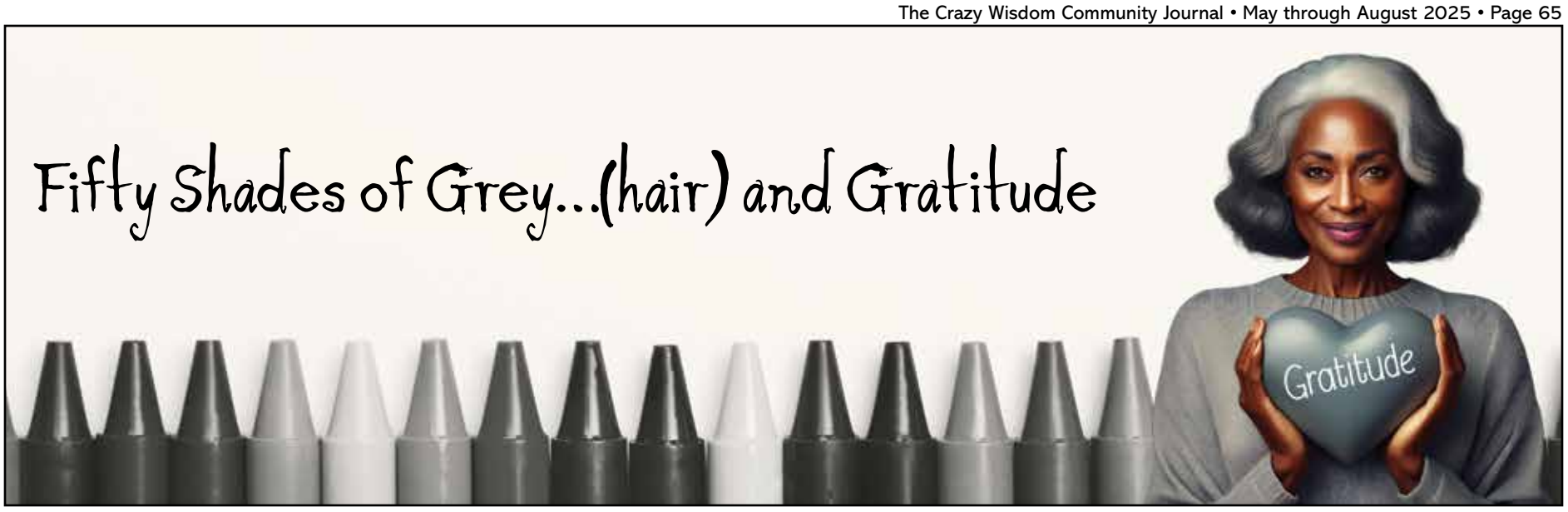
Make the polenta: In a medium saucepan, bring the vegetable broth to a gentle boil. Slowly whisk in the cornmeal, stirring constantly to prevent clumping. Reduce the heat to low and cook for 15-20 minutes, stirring frequently, until thick and creamy. Stir in the olive oil (or vegan butter), salt, pepper, oregano, fresh basil, and nutritional yeast. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm.

Assemble the dish: Spoon the warm polenta onto plates or a serving platter. Top generously with the roasted vegetables, allowing their juices to seep into the polenta. Drizzle with a little extra olive oil or a squeeze of lemon for brightness.

Serve and enjoy: Garnish with extra fresh basil and a pinch of red pepper flakes if desired. Serve immediately while the polenta is warm and creamy.

Polenta's rich, velvety texture pairs beautifully with the freshness of spring and early summer vegetables. This dish is proof that simple ingredients, when treated with care, can create something truly delicious.

Fifty Shades of Grey...(hair) and Gratitude



By Angela Verges

In a box of Crayola crayons there is only one shade of grey. As for my aging body, there may be fifty shades of grey.

In a box of Crayola crayons there is only one shade of grey. As for my aging body, there may be fifty shades of grey. As I've aged, I've learned that there is a skill set needed to age gracefully. If I were to place an ad seeking a person interested in aging gracefully, it would read:

- Must have a sense of humor.
- Be willing to laugh at yourself.
- Cannot be terrified at the first sighting of grey hair.
- Art skills are a plus (for drawing and shaping grey eyebrows).
- Preference given to those willing to share their experiences.

Recently, wild grey hairs have sprouted up around my body like flowers in bloom, but not as lovely. Is this considered the onset of aging? Maybe. If you're feeling frustrated about the aging process, you may need a change in perspective.

If you're feeling frustrated about the aging process, you may need a change in perspective.

Have you ever heard the saying, "life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it?" Well, there are things worse than aging with a few grey hairs. As I attempt to age gracefully, I know I have options. I can poke fun at having to pull my wild chin hairs, the cost of dyeing my grey roots, (or not), or debate with my hair stylist about eliminating the grey in my eyebrows.

Ask yourself, what makes you feel fabulous? Maybe do something with your hair that you wouldn't normally do or take a leap of faith into the fashion world. The day I decided to purchase red eyeglasses was a day I decided to make a bold statement. I tried on frames that were octagon shaped, oval, and oversized. Nothing tickled my fancy, or looked good with my hair, until the red frames landed on my face. The red and grey seem to work together!

Aging can be a horror movie, an action film, or a situational comedy. You decide! My life has fifty shades of grey that crosses all genres. For example, there is suspense every day as I wonder where I will discover the next grey hair.

During my college years, I worked as a day care assistant. One of the songs we sang with the kids was, "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes." We would tap each body part as we sang the words. Well, today I sing that song as I wonder where the next grey hair will sprout…eyes and ears and mouth and nose?

That's when the suspense story can become a horror scene. However, the drama can be scaled back into a situational comedy with a change in perspective. We can change your fifty shades of grey (hair), into fifty shades of gratitude.

I read a quote that said, "Shades of gratitude isn't just one color—it's a whole spectrum of joy. From small daily blessings to life-changing moments, gratitude comes in all shades."

Did you know that practicing gratitude has benefits? Some of the benefits are:

- Boosts Happiness
- Reduces Stress
- Sparks Creativity
- Encourages Kindness
- Fuels Motivation

You can put the gratitude concept to the test. Generate a list of 50 things you are grateful for. There is no need to do this all at once. Create a gratitude journal, and each day for three weeks, write three things that you are grateful for. Keep your entries simple if you'd like; don't make this a challenging task.

Note how you feel at the end of your time practicing gratitude. Earlier I mentioned the process of aging and greying can be viewed as a situational comedy. This comes across in my journaling. One of my entries says, "I'm grateful for my son and his sense of humor."

I read a quote that said, "Shades of gratitude isn't just one color – it's a whole spectrum of joy. From small daily blessings to life-changing moments, gratitude comes in all shades."

My son and I were having a conversation one day. He stopped talking mid-sentence and rubbed his hand across my chin and said, "You have a little peach fuzz."

Clearly, he was jealous that my beard was thicker than his.

As you age gracefully, tame your wild hairs if you must, but move forward with humor, grace, and joy. Be bold. Be beautiful. Be you.

As you age gracefully, tame your wild hairs if you must, but move forward with humor, grace, and joy. Be bold. Be beautiful. Be you.

Even if you have fifty shades of grey, you can still be fabulous. Gratitude turns every moment into a masterpiece of color.

Angela Verges is a native Detroiter who blogs about her wacky kids, weight gain, and wild chin hair, among other things. She views life's situations uniquely through steamed eyeglasses due to hot flashes. You can find her on stage bringing laughter to others. Follow Angela on Instagram at writermama223, on Facebook @angela.verges or visit her website angelaverges.net.

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A MELDING OF PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

By Samantha Beidoun • Photos by Hilary Nichols

Chelsie Skowyra is a Chelsea-based claircognizant, clairvoyant empath who finds great pleasure in helping others find peace in their true selves. Along with her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology/Anthropology and a Masters of Marriage and Family Therapy, she's blended in her own well-rounded spiritual mentoring approach. Skowyra and I went to grade school together, and I recently had the opportunity to take a fascinating dive into where the universe has led her.

Was spiritual therapy always your career path? If so, what got you into it? If not, what was your original interest in?

Chelsie Skowyra: Blending spirituality with psychology was always the universe's plan for me, but it took me a little bit of trying to do the traditional path to figure that out. I went straight from undergrad to grad school with all intentions of becoming a couple's therapist or a therapist for children. After spending years working with children and families experiencing trauma, I experienced secondary traumatic stress. The system was failing not only the families I was working with, but also the professionals.

This burnout led to my big spiritual awakening where I realized that there could be a path to healing that brought in all the parts of the soul that traditional psychotherapy left behind. I knew there had to be a path for being a healer that did not require sacrificing one's own well-being.

It's funny when I look back though, all the signs were there. My first introduction to therapy as a career was in a J14 magazine where they said Pisces make great therapists. As a Pisces, I took that to heart and ran with it. I recently found a paper from my time in grad school where I talked about the importance of balancing intuition with thorough assessment–another example of this work making itself known to me before I realized it.

What exactly does a spiritual mentor do?

Chelsie Skowyra: A spiritual mentor provides a space for healing and self-exploration through spiritual practices and concepts with an understanding of how the systems we exist in also play a role. A spiritual mentor may use tools like rituals, energy work, or tarot/oracle to help their clients make peace with their past and build a miraculous life.

How/when did you realize you were an empath?

Chelsie Skowyra: Recognizing that I was an empath was a gradual process. My family members always tell me that when I was a very young child, I would walk up to anyone looking sad in public and ask if they wanted to be my friend. As an adolescent, I remember crying about something a friend was going through and my mom asking why I had to make everyone else's problems my own.

Becoming a therapist made it crystal clear. Where other people could "leave work at work," I was going home and feeling every feeling that had been shared in session that day. It felt impossible to separate my story from my client's story and that is when I truly realized that maybe I was more than just a little compassionate and empathetic. In my inner work, I've recognized how even my experience of fibromyalgia was a sign that I was absorbing other's stress. I've had to learn how to celebrate my empathy while still protecting my well-being.

BLENDING SPIRITUALITY WITH PSYCHOLOGY WAS ALWAYS THE UNIVERSE'S PLAN FOR ME, BUT IT TOOK ME A LITTLE BIT OF TRYING TO DO THE TRADITIONAL PATH TO FIGURE THAT OUT.

What is the most challenging part of being an empath?

Chelsie Skowyra: This might be a hot take because it's not your traditional "it's hard to feel the feelings of everyone else" answer. The most challenging part of being an empath is taking accountability for one's own feelings and projections. It can be the easy way out to just label yourself an empath and think that any negative energy must be someone else's. Empaths have to spend time with their energy so they can tell the difference between what is theirs and what is someone else's. Taking accountability for one's perception of what they are feeling, and why, is how they grow that skill.

You have created some journals, so journaling is probably an essential tool in your personal practice. What other ways do you encourage your true self to be expressed?

Chelsie Skowyra: Let yourself love what you love and love it deeply. I love music so I'm always curating playlists and including music in my rituals. I even created a whole workshop about shadow work inspired by Taylor Swift. Find the things that make you feel like life is worth living and share those things with the world… [even if] imperfectly. Meditate for three minutes with your eyes open. Paint a watercolor picture with only one color. Take nature walks where you mindfully reflect on how nature mirrors your inner world.

You hold retreats anywhere from Michigan, Ohio, and New Hampshire depending on the locale you see fit for your theme. What would a participant in one of your retreats be able to expect?

Chelsie Skowyra: My retreats are a self-care experience for people who love a balance of connecting with the magical and grounded parts of spirituality. Every activity, the food we serve, and the gift bags (that are filled with tools that we'll use during the retreat itself and for integration after the retreat) is intentional without the pressure of being perfect. These are not green juice only and meditate for five hours kind of retreats. We dance, we cry, we spend time in nature, we laugh, we do rituals. Every person who has attended my retreats remarks on how cared for they felt. I love giving people the space to just connect within and spend the time engaging in the spiritual practices that they normally don't [make time for].

What do you love most about what you do?

Chelsie Skowyra: Watching people fall in love with themselves and respond to life's challenges differently than they would have before.

EMPATHS HAVE TO SPEND TIME WITH THEIR ENERGY SO THEY CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT IS THEIRS AND WHAT IS SOMEONE ELSE'S. TAKING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ONE'S PERCEPTION OF WHAT THEY ARE FEELING, AND WHY, IS HOW THEY GROW THAT SKILL.

What is your biggest strength?

Chelsie Skowyra: My compassion. I care SO deeply about everything and everyone. It constantly keeps me inspired to show up to this work. It provides an endless well of creativity that I have so much fun connecting to.

What challenges did you face when building your business?

Chelsie Skowyra: With my departure from the traditional therapy path, it can be difficult for me to find clients who understand exactly what I do and how it can help them. I encourage people to take ownership of their growth and healing, so it can also be hard for me to market myself when it's not just *me* that is creating these outcomes.

When I first started my business, I fell into the law of attraction marketing trap where I paid a lot of money for business coaches to tell me that all I needed to do was believe in myself enough and my business would magically be successful. Of course, the law of attraction is part of building a business, but I needed solid structures and strategies to support that energy as well.

If someone were to come to you for services, what can they expect?

Chelsie Skowyra: If someone were to come to me for services, they can expect to be welcomed with warmth and gentleness. I love to start with a free consultation (or as I like to think of them, an intuitive meet-cute) where we get the chance to connect and talk about what they'd be hoping to receive from spiritual mentoring. This gives them the opportunity to see if they even like me and would feel safe enough to start this work together. It gives me the opportunity to see if spiritual mentoring would be right for them and to let them know if not. As a spiritual mentor, I don't diagnose, treat mental illness, or provide emergency services. If someone needs those things, I provide them with referrals.

Even though I don't treat mental illness from the perspective of eliminating or reducing symptoms, many people with depression, anxiety, ADHD, and other conditions have found adding spiritual mentoring to their healing to be super helpful. If someone is struggling with dissociation, depersonalization, or hallucinations, spiritual mentoring would not be a supportive option for them.

Once the decision has been made to work together, they can book a package of sessions and schedule. I usually meet virtually but have arranged in person sessions before as well. There is something extra healing about a spiritual mentoring conversation while walking through a nature preserve.

To learn more about Chelsie's services please visit her website at chelsieskowyra.com or email her at chelsieskowyra.mft@gmail.com. You can also find her on social media @chelsieskowyra.

A Traditional Yoga School Hiding in Plain Sight on Main Street:

An Interview with Angela Jamison

By Ashley Waddell Tingstad • Photos by Hilary Nichols

For the last 15 years, in the early morning between five and eight, the 200 block of South Main Street has filled with yoga practitioners who come and go before the town comes to life. It's a diverse group, ranging from those in their teens to those in their 80s, across all sorts of life situations and physical capacities. The yoga they practice is tailored to the individual. Depending on the person, the practice might include various physical asanas, breathing techniques, and meditations. What they all have in common is that they're all part of a school, and a community organization, called Ashtanga Yoga Ann Arbor.

Since its founding in 2010, this place has been known and discovered only by word of mouth. But in September of 2024, a small sign appeared on Main Street, tucked into the vitrine between the Pretzel Bell and Himalayan Bazaar—almost like a fairy door. The teacher there, Angela Jamison, chose this tiny glimmer of visibility after years of quiet, intense focus on just two things: sharing the yoga techniques from her lineage and building a grassroots community.

Then two months later, in November 2024, a major event massively increased her personal responsibility to share publicly about her lineage. Her teacher, Sharath Jois, died suddenly when they were hiking together with a group in the Shenandoah mountains. This interview shares a little bit about that transformation.

Ashley Waddell Tingstad: Can you describe what it is that you teach?

Angela Jamison: Yoga has so many approximations in English. Most are good; but all leave something out. For our method, which is a classical eight-limbed practice rooted in the teachings of T. Krishnamacharya, we just say that yoga is relationship. It's simple, but, taken seriously, it's vitally clarifying. I would say, transformative.

Applying the organizing principle of relationship to each facet of experience, and each choice on the path of a life, tends to help us move toward balance. The proposition that yoga is a practice of conscious relationship applies both within ourselves–because a human being is also a cluster of many intersecting relationships–and also across the many, many points of contact that one's life has with the greater world and cosmos.

Ashtanga yoga is usually thought of as a highly energized physical practice, done each morning as a way to frame our daily life as a yoga practice in itself. True, physical asana is one of the practices I do most days, and have done for nearly 25 years. But, this is just the most obvious entry point. A lot of what I've been taught by my teachers is about mindset, or how to create ritual through contacting sacred experiences each day, about navigating different phases of life like parenthood, professional advancement, or elder care.

I'm especially interested in practices that we can do when life gets hard—when we're tempted to fall into our unconscious patterning or paroxysms of suffering.

Yoga is *very* good tech in a world bursting with mental malware. I want everyone I work with to have a whole toolbox of techniques they can go to under stress, so that we can be at our best for others and for ourselves.

The acute stressors of these times are actually what prompted me to put up a sign on Main Street this fall after 15 years of allowing people to find our school through sheer coincidence or luck.

Our school had already held steady as a place to practice together through some really hard times. We met online or outdoors every day of Covid, for example, and went through the upheavals of 2016 in a way that turned hard times into grist for the mill of practice But it's not like the challenges are only in the past. Ashtanga is not a bypass or escape from these things. What I have observed in our broader world this past year, and what we might expect in the short term, is a crescendo in environmental and technological stressors. It's getting harder for humans to find peace inside ourselves and to be with others peacefully.

It's normal for this stress to lead our minds to distraction, delusion, and confusion. Sometimes we spin in place; sometimes we dissociate or even self-destruct. Ashtanga yoga was designed in stressful times too, and crafted explicitly to mitigate these states, slowly fostering discernment and discipline and genuine, non-theatrical, non-mawkish love within each practitioner.

This fall, after 15 years of sweet relationships with diverse students I meet through kismet, I felt a responsibility to be make our school just a little more visible. The inner peace part of yoga is real, and so is the outward peacemaking action it fosters in this world. There is a precise integrity in it, and sublimity. I see that now is a time to hold these methods in just a slightly less esoteric way than I have in the past.

Ashtanga yoga is usually thought of as a highly energized physical practice, done each morning as a way to frame our daily life as a yoga practice in itself.

Ashley Waddell Tingstad: Can you share about your teacher's death?

Angela Jamison: It was sudden. For decades, I have been planning for him to outlive me, as he was only 53. He had a massive heart attack while hiking with a group of his senior students in Virginia. I was holding his hand as he was leaving this world, and understood that he was at peace. It has helped many people to know that he had a year-long case of rheumatic fever that severely weakened his heart as a child.

For me, personally, it seems that being with him and a few treasured colleagues in his final moments has transmitted a peace that passes understanding. He taught so much, to hundreds of thousands through the world, in the time that he had. It is really something to have a teacher like that in life.

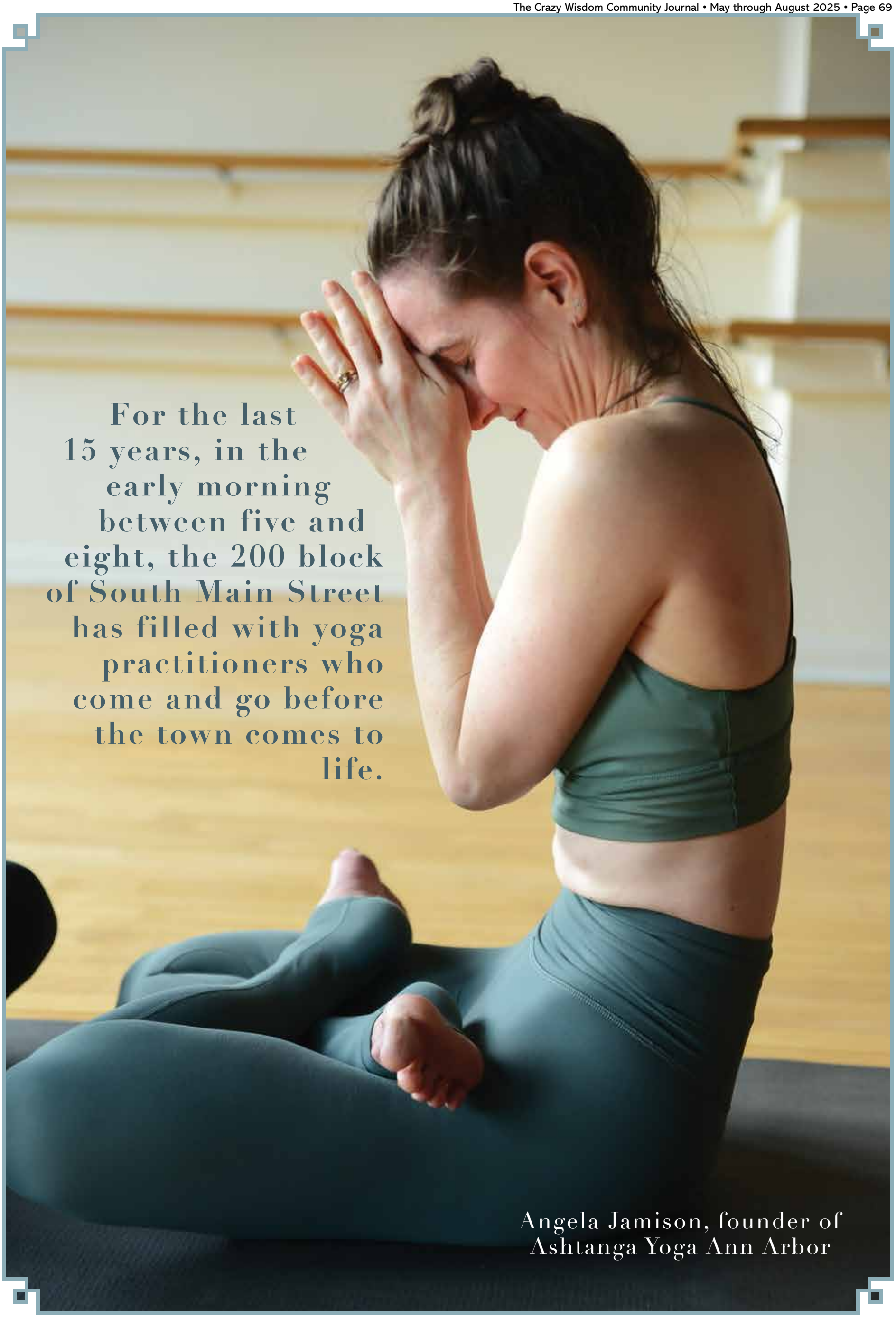
In the time that I have left, be it days or decades, I expect to be celebrating him and missing him each day as I teach. In that, I have never felt so alive. Now, the energy of his transmission of these methods to me feels more electric than a single person can ever be.

This is why I'd like to share about our shala, after all these years of operating under the radar, just a block away from the Crazy Wisdom bookstore. This method is intensely alive in Ann Arbor and has been for years.

Ashley Waddell Tingstad: How did you end up doing this work?

Angela Jamison: It's something I resisted in various ways until Sharath made it inevitable in 2011. I'd been practicing ashtanga yoga for 11 years by then. In 2009, I'd followed my partner to Michigan from California, after grad school at UCLA. The Sociology department generously gave me a lectureship, though the academic job market had collapsed due to the financial crisis.

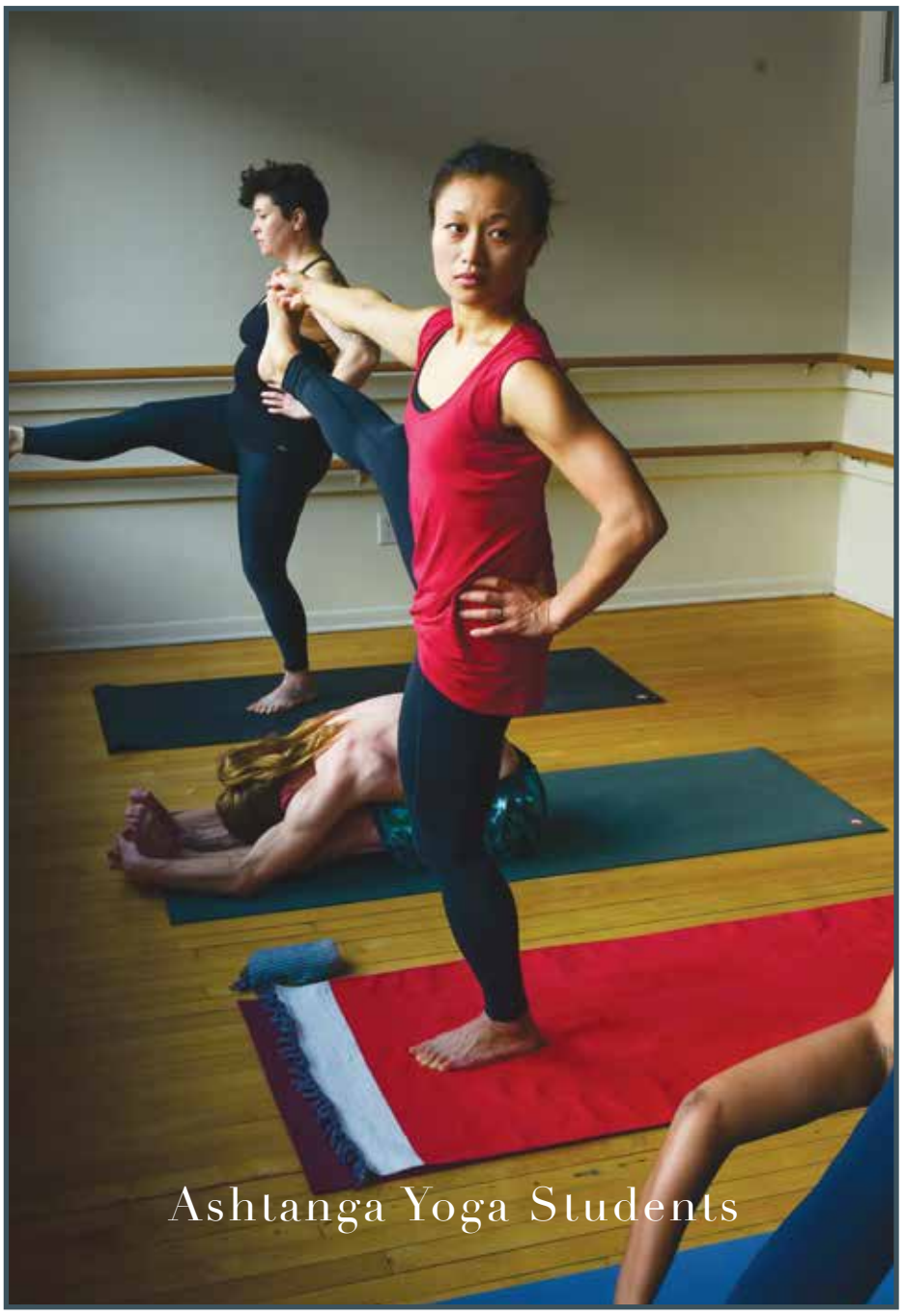
Leaving my yoga community in LA was devastating. I lacked vision around my academic career and was lonely for spiritual community. During my first two years here—when I was spending winters in India and waiting for the



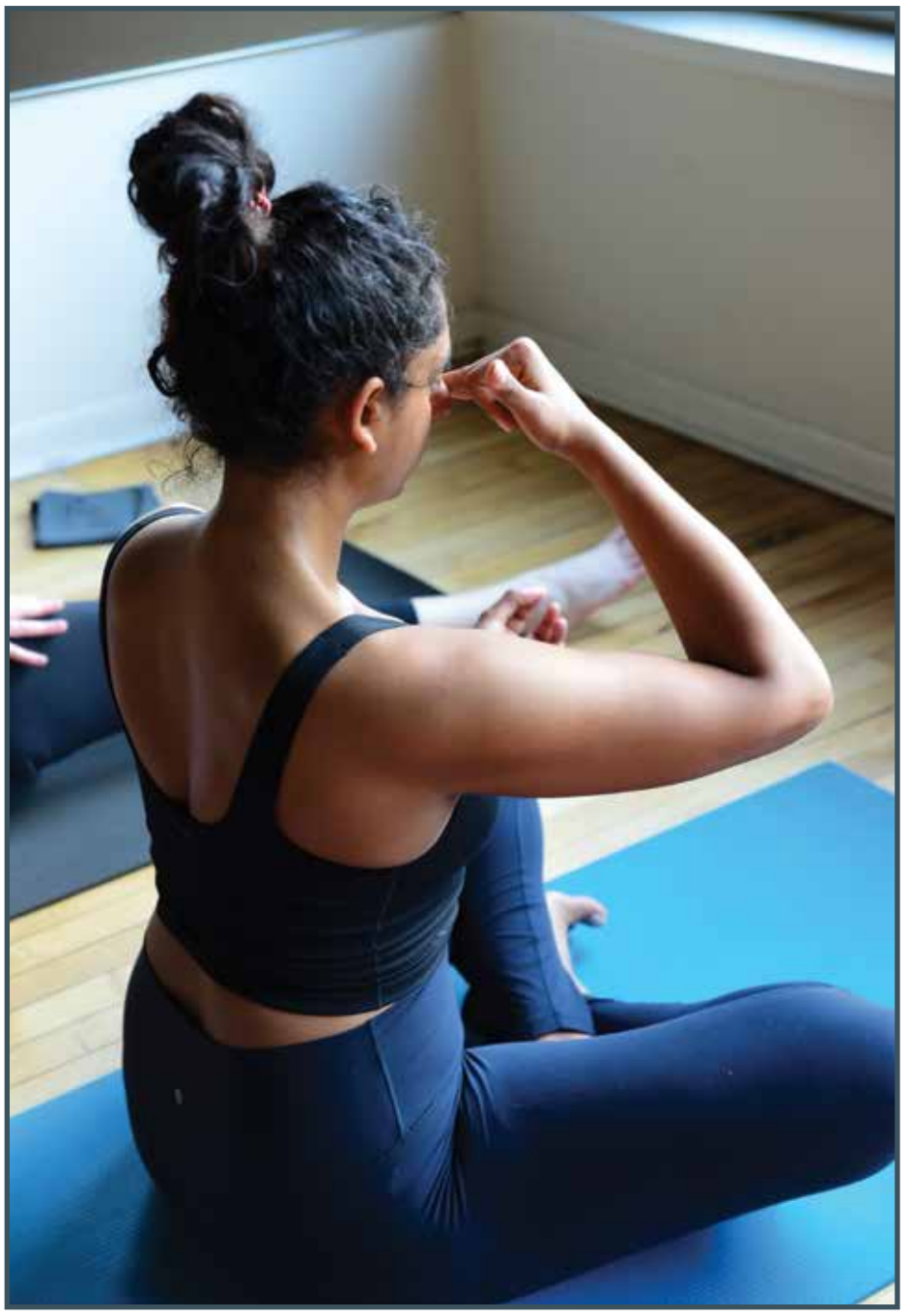
For the last 15 years, in the early morning between five and eight, the 200 block of South Main Street has filled with yoga practitioners who come and go before the town comes to life.

Angela Jamison, founder of Ashtanga Yoga Ann Arbor

An Interview with Angela Jamison



Ashtanga Yoga Students



job market to revive—everyone else suspected that teaching yoga was my future. My attention and passion had been centered there for a decade already. Sharath saw it too, but when he attempted to give me his blessing to teach in 2010, I said I wasn't ready. I knew I didn't know anything about yoga and felt inadequate to help others.

Then, as now, I felt that communicating and sharing with others about yoga, the body, and our inner world is sacred.

My loneliness evaporated with the snows and was replaced with a sense of real connection. The people here were grounded, conscientious, and very smart. I stopped planning my escape back to California, and started telling friends in LA that the yoga people in Michigan were "the most sincere I'd ever met."

One of my favorite facts about our shala, and my life, is that Ann Arbor *itself* transformed me into a teacher. I get to live in this town which changed me and gave me purpose.

In spring 2010, the lovely owners and students of A2Yoga pestered me to teach a Saturday asana class that, at last, I could no longer resist. There was no one else equipped to do it, even though I also felt unprepared and inadequate.

Then, some regulars in that class figured out I was doing my personal practice every morning at home, in a room where two other mats could fit. Pretty soon there were two different people waiting on my back porch on Spring Street every morning at six. The cost of admission was the task of memorizing a personal ashtanga practice such that one could breathe along with me for an hour or two before work.

My loneliness evaporated with the snows and was replaced with a sense of real connection. The people here were grounded, conscientious, and very smart. I stopped planning my escape back to California, and started telling friends in LA that the yoga people in Michigan were "the most sincere I'd ever met."

The following winter back in India, Sharath didn't leave me a choice about whether he would bless me to teach. He never said to quit my day job, but for my particular personality, I needed to make a bold choice about my professional life. Devotional commitment to teaching–and giving up academia decisively—reorganized my energy. So, I returned from India that April and broke it to people here that I would not be teaching Sociology that semester as planned. Each one swallowed a grin or shook their head knowingly. I had been deluding myself and was the last one to know my own path.

There was a whole decade of ashtanga practice before this, in which yoga became a daily personal discipline and a form of devotion. But without the move to Michigan, ashtanga for me would have remained personal and internal, not a vocation.

Ashley Waddell Tingstad: Do you miss the academic life?

Angela Jamison: I would miss it terribly in any other situation. But here, I get to work with researchers and intellectuals every day. One of the most rewarding experiences in my life is holding the space for others as they take refuge in their own bodies. Scientists, when they set an intention to research their experience from within, often discover the most gorgeous worlds of interoception and metacognition.

But this is not just true for academics, of course. I tend to work with people who have a lot of responsibility in life, and who look after many others. There are also many practitioners at our shala who arrive having already developed strong spiritual disciplines, especially sitting meditation and community caregiving work. In all these cases, making real peace with the body, and doing so in a supportive and mostly silent community, tends to be brilliantly revealing—joyful, too. And profoundly sane: these methods are enormously stabilizing for the mind, emotions, and behaviors.

In addition to being every bit my teacher's student, since I met him 22 years ago, I'm also the child and grandchild of spiritual caregivers. Although academia gave me professional opportunity and personal development, service was my real family inheritance. There is a kind of professionalism my family have transmitted to me that is a huge resource. Specifically, each student's experience is private and confidential. My own role is to keep a clear code of ethics and support others in an inspired way, while understanding that teaching is not about me, my emotional needs, or building a personal following.

That said, it is enormously rewarding that directing our shala allows me to be a sociologist every day, running experiments and crafting a new organizational form that takes only what it needs from the paradigms of the yoga studio, the mystery school, and the community organization.

Back in LA, my efforts to protect my yoga practice from the inexorable process of commodification were not legible to most people. I was immersed in a relatively materialistic culture. I find in Ann Arbor an artistic, grounded community where education is highly valued. Most everyone here understands why I would not build our shala as a particularly capitalist enterprise. Sociology taught me that more effective, ethical, truthful, and beautiful organizational forms are possible. The shala is teaching me that, in community life and spiritual practice, the creative possibilities are boundless.

Ashley Waddell Tingstad: Where are you from originally?

Angela Jamison: I grew up in rural Yellowstone County, Montana on a ranch. It was an isolated setting with few resources of any kind. But there was abundant natural beauty and so many animal friends. Nature and animals are core inspirations of ashtanga method; I believe this is why I initially fell in love with the practice.

As a farm kid I did a lot of physical work in addition to playing with animals and adventures in the wilderness, but an obsessive curiosity about the wider world got the best of me: I decided as a teen to become a foreign correspondent. We didn't get a newspaper; the few times I got my hands on one, I was thrilled by news of the world. I was lucky to receive a full scholarship to leave the state for college. Thereafter, global travel and language study have always been priorities for me. Ashtanga is itself a global practice, one united by the common language of the body. I feel so deeply at home within it, just as much as I do in Ann Arbor.

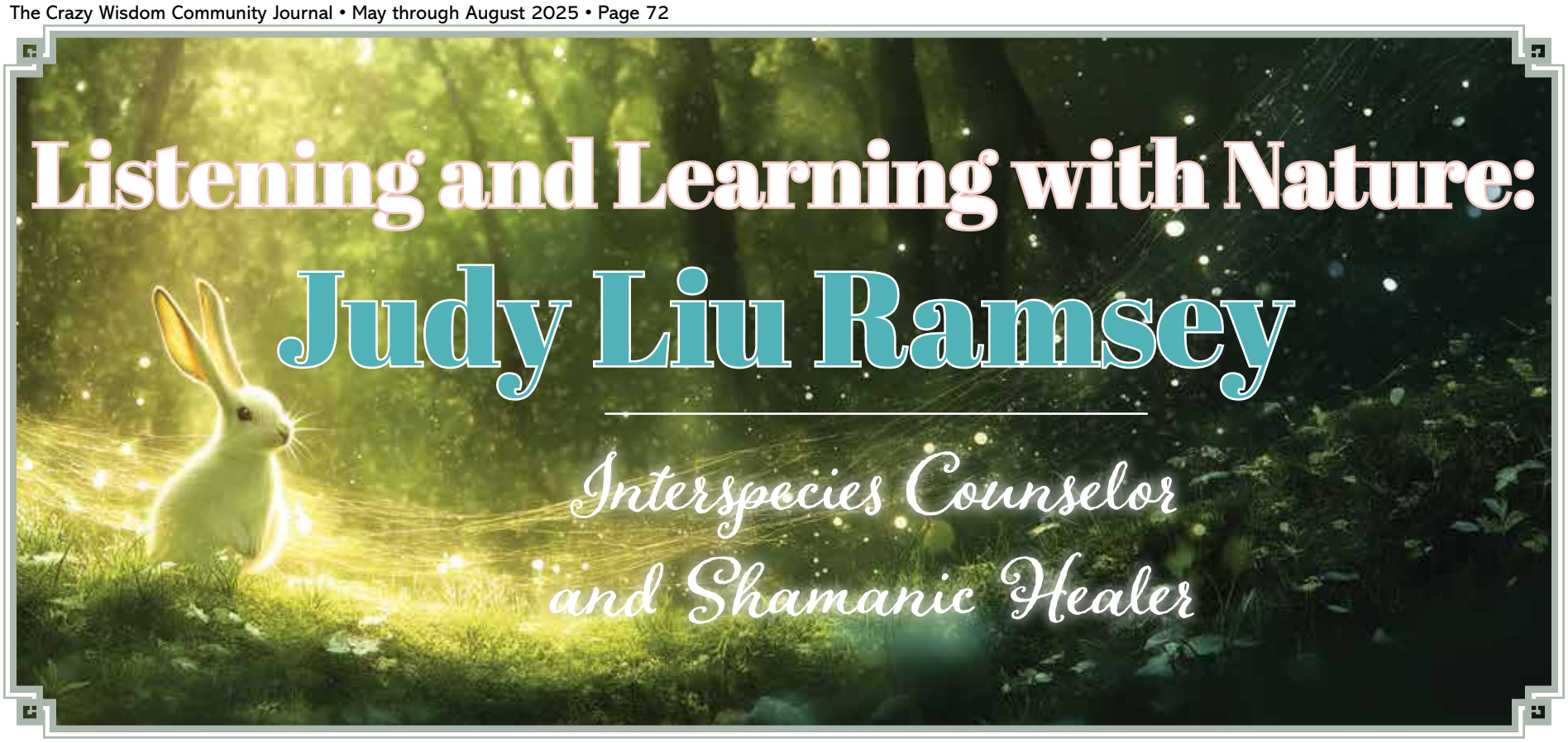
Culturally and geographically, I am a long way from those origins as a rural farm kid, but ashtanga yoga is a path of including and integrating everything in our lives. There's no inner contradiction around the changes. It is all relationship.

Angela Jamison began exploring ashtanga yoga in 2000 and has practiced daily without a break since April 2003. She first met her teacher, R. Sharath Jois, in California in the early 2000s. In 2011, she received Sharath's blessing to teach yoga, and in 2017, Sharath certified her as one of a handful of senior ashtanga teachers worldwide. Before graduate school in Sociology at UCLA, Jamison studied history, philosophy, and journalism at college in Oregon, and spent years doing social justice work and historical research around the world.

Learn more about Ashtanga Yoga Ann Arbor on their website, ashtangaannarbor.com or contact Jamison directly through email by writing to annarborashtanaga@gmail.com. The shala does not take drop-in students. Rather, the school offers a Foundations Course three times per year. This class series meets Saturday mornings at nine, for seven weeks, and constitutes a large time commitment. It is free of charge. Anyone who is interested can schedule a weekday class observation to meet Jamison in person and learn more about the Foundations Course.

There are also many practitioners at our shala who arrive having already developed strong spiritual disciplines, especially sitting meditation and community caregiving work. In all these cases, making real peace with the body, and doing so in a supportive and mostly silent community, tends to be brilliantly revealing joyful, too.

Ashtanga Yoga assistant Christine Baker, founder Angela Jamison, and assistant Kristen Drozdowski.



Listening and Learning with Nature:

Judy Liu Ramsey

Interspecies Counselor and Shamanic Healer

By Michelle McLemore • Photos by Edda Pacifico

"Nature's first green is gold," Robert Frost wrote of the rejuvenating energy alive in spring's first buds and blades. The myriad shades of green delight a nature-lover, transforming walks in the woods into an embrace from the Green Man of lore.

It's a rare individual who paints their living room walls deep green. As soon as our video chat went live, Judy Ramsey and I simultaneously noticed our backgrounds. "I like your wall color choice," I said.

She smiled and responded, "I was thinking the same about yours." Ramsey's relaxed face and deep-seeing eyes were framed with brown bobbed hair, parted left. The soothing green of the walls were accented with wood-edged furniture and gold framed nature wall hangings. Through a window, wind chimes gently punctuated key responses throughout the interview.

The room was soothing, but Ramsey herself, seemed the embodiment of nature's serenity.

Living on a farm in Chelsea, Ramsey's journey from community developer and social worker to shamanic practitioner and animal chaplain exemplifies an authentic evolution of one's unfolding of identity, own healing, and epiphany in recognizing one's place within the actual world contrary to the confines and misperceptions of society.

At 78, she now has nearly 18 years of experience working with humans and non-humans to improve communication, counsel, and heal across (and within) various beings. Though, this may not have been on the radar when she earned her master's in education in Community Development from the University of Michigan, the experiences no doubt teased out already inherent empathies and energetic connections while she consulted on teen pregnancies, homicide patterns, suicide rates, drug use, and addiction among young people.

Ramsey grew up in Colorado Springs. "We hunted and fished and were in the mountains a lot. I remember talking to the Hidden Folk, flowers, trees and animals—even rocks when I was very young, probably until the age of seven or eight years, when, like everyone else I know, it got 'schooled' out of us."

Ramsey recalled always having pockets full of rocks. "I've been talking with them [rocks] since I was quite small. Some of my best friends are stone people even today. Even when I went to Scotland for the first time around 26 or 27 and met the Machrie Moor Standing Stones, I felt giggly energy, like joy, coming up from the rock. We're still good friends. The cliffs and canyons in Canyon de Chelly, particularly Spider Rock and the cliffs of del Muerto [in Arizona] were good friends."

Living on a farm in Chelsea, Ramsey's journey from community developer and social worker to shamanic practitioner and animal chaplain exemplifies an authentic evolution of one's unfolding of identity, own healing, and epiphany in recognizing one's place within the actual world contrary to the confines and misperceptions of society.

It wasn't just stones, though, that Ramsey felt the life force within and camaraderie to share. "I talked to Christmas trees that we'd bring into the house, and they'd talk back. My invisible friends weren't invisible. I spoke with animals both wild and domestic. We had around nine Siamese cats with us at any given time until I was about 12, who were all my friends."

She paused, then addressed the inevitable doubt readers may still be carrying. "All of us were born with the ability to communicate with animals and nature spirits. Most [people] remember understanding [the language of nature] as kids, but we are taught not to value imagination. If you can't imagine, it doesn't happen for you. From ages seven or eight to college, it isn't really encouraged in the mainstream. But, it is changing. There is movement to value independence versus conformity."

Conformity has been the cautionary shield used for many generations. Ramsey's family was no exception. "Grandmother and Mother were quite intuitive, but Mother was embarrassed about her skills, which she did not use openly. They would be embarrassed if I spoke about it at school. Consequently, I set most of the abilities aside, noticing only sporadically my connections to my hidden friends."

This suppression, or setting aside, of the whispers and nudges from around her could only last so long. "In my late forties I recovered my intuitive skills and awareness. My mind was foggy due to menopausal symptoms, so instead of an office job where I had to multitask a dozen things at once, I trained as a craniosacral therapist and began a more intuitive path with bodywork. That was when I met Penelope Smith, a premier animal communicator, who is still a friend and mentor."

Ramsey credits Smith for starting the 1980s movement which made animal communication a socially acceptable service as well as integral support for holistic veterinarian care. Ramsey enrolled in all of Smith's courses and now teaches Smith's telepathic animal communication among others.

"About 10 years ago, I met Carla Meeske," She continued. "I had been thrown from a horse and broke my back. I couldn't move and was in a body brace for

Judy Liu Ramsey *continued...*

three and a half months. So, I took courses online." Ramsey was "fascinated and strongly drawn" to what Meeske offered, which led to a year-long intensive in Shamanic practice.

The ease at which Ramsey picked up the skills made it clear that she was remembering prior life experiences. Sandra Ingerman would become her next friend and mentor. Ramsey studied diligently and became an approved instructor for Ingerman's classes. In 2025 Ramsey will be presenting Ingerman's intensive along with her own curriculum for shamanic animal communication and healing for animals. Additionally, Ramsey is also offering her own Interspecies Counselor Training which combines both telepathic and shamanic skills.

"All of us were born with the ability to communicate with animals and nature spirits. Most [people] remember understanding [the language of nature] as kids, but we are taught not to value imagination. If you can't imagine, it doesn't happen for you. From ages seven or eight to college, it isn't really encouraged in the mainstream. But, it is changing. There is movement to value independence versus conformity."

–Judy Ramsey

Her passion, or soul's joy, connects Ramsey's childhood to her current presence. "Everything was alive to me then, and everything is alive to me now. If I have a house issue, I talk to the spirit of the house and the spirit of the land. I have my altar underneath Grandmother Magnolia. I also have a vine house."

Ramsey explained that she raises rabbits in the house. As they each pass on, they would be buried outdoors. Until… "A house bunny asked me if they [the bunnies] could have a designated spot all together—It asked to be buried near an ash tree, as a type of bunny memorial garden." Ramsey asked permission from the ash tree which agreed. "I used a pendulum so the tree could show me where to bury the bunny so we wouldn't have to cut into its root."

Awareness, consideration, and humble respect for every living entity directs Ramsey's thoughts and actions. I mentioned the respectfulness of the practice and the wind chimes tinkled immediately.

We laughed at their agreement. Ramsey added, "The trees love the wind chimes. They seem happier with the bells playing on their branches." I wondered if a playful wind also enjoyed the opportunity to chime into conversations in this way.

Wind, tree, or rabbit—listening and respecting other being's preferences requires a wider understanding of the world than many consider. As we talked further, this respect became clear as the foundation of Shamanism.

"Shamanic practice is not a religion," Ramsey said. "The basic concept is that everything has a spirit understood as Animism. There are three worlds for journeying to for answers and compassionate spirit allies will be guides and want to help."

I questioned if she was ever accused of appropriation. She shook her head. "This is not appropriating a specific culture. There is no disrespect. Journeying is part of every culture."

Ramsey continued, "The term 'shaman' is currently a generic term assigned in the 18th century by anthropologists and others to refer to indigenous medicine people who contact the spirit world while in an altered state of consciousness. The term is like the Kleenex brand of the practice. Originally it was a Siberian Tungus term referring to the spiritual and wisdom leader of a village. It means 'one who knows' or 'one who sees from the heart.' To be called a shaman, your village or community appoints you the title. Otherwise, we are known as shamanic practitioners. Elsewhere in the world, they are known in Peru as paqos, curanderos, in Tibet as amchis."

On a personal level, "'Shamanic' means to me that a spiritual aspect of healing or communication is happening," Ramsey noted. "I can do telepathic communication, which is mind to mind, as well as shamanic communication, which is heart to heart. When combined, I have a powerful tool to offer that goes very deeply into communication with another being, another spirit."–"I started seeing the spirits of pets sitting on my clients. Ethically as a therapist, I have to wait for them to bring it up. So, I would casually prompt them by asking, 'Do you have animals at home?' They would describe them, and then I could initiate conversation."

Ramsey also was close with her own animals. She had a thoroughbred and several quarter horses. "It was my horse, Classy, who first showed me how to communicate with animals and encouraged me to pursue it as a passion.

Wind, tree, or rabbit—listening and respecting other being's preferences requires a wider understanding of the world than many consider. As we talked further, this respect became clear as the foundation of Shamanism.

They showed me how to open my heart so I could receive communication. I have always listened to what shows up, and when the communications began, I literally and figuratively heard that and directed my energies to it. It was a partnership."

How does it work? How does it feel? My mind raced between my casual attempts to communicate with my house plants, trees, and cat. "For animals it's quicker [communication]," Ramsey described. "I receive as a felt sense—see pictures, hear sounds, get impressions and feelings. It's no different than the trees or rocks but slower and more subtle than with animals."

She continued, "People have chipmunk mind—it's very rapid because we are used to processing rapidly. The key is to slow down the process of receiving information. Stay with it long enough. New students are always anxious to do it well and not make a mistake. I say, 'Go ahead, it's not life or death.'"

Ramsey recalled what it was like when she first started offering sessions for people to communicate with their pets. "I felt pressured from people who wanted answers for their animals. I learned to lean into it. I want to hear what the animal has to share." And what the animals want to share takes precedence over what the humans may want to know.

Her passion, or soul's joy, connects Ramsey's childhood to her current presence. "Everything was alive to me then, and everything is alive to me now."

Heart to Heart
Shamanic Healing
Animal Communication
Judy Liu Ramsey

Certified Animal Chaplain, Interspecies Counselor, Shamanic Practitioner

for information or appointment, contact: info@judyramsey.net
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Judy Liu Ramsey *continued...*

"Constant contact is key with an animal versus hopping back and forth with different questions to get the task done. People tend to disconnect with the animal, and with each other, in a similar process. I teach to stay connected with each other. It's the group energy that amplifies what you get and what you receive." The wind chimes applauded her.

Ramsey is daily surrounded by advisors and close companions. She has a cat, Ernie, who is four and recently adopted from Huron Valley. Stitch is a four-year-old labrador retriever, and Balthazar is a California King snake who is about eight years old.

Balthazar was inherited from a friend's daughter going away to college. Ramsey divulged, "Balthazar is a clear communicator and an amazing spirit. He likes socializing but on his own terms. We have a meditation during certain parts of the year. His terrarium has a view of the east window. He likes to watch the sun rise. We watch it together." Ramsey explained, as part of the animal chaplain program she learned people often have unintentional practices or rituals with their pets. "When we become aware of them, and do them intentionally, it [the time and sharing] becomes special."

Then she asked me: "Do you have a pet?"

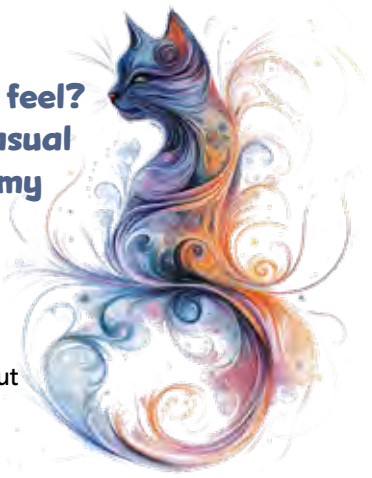
"Yes." My throat began to tighten. (I get emotional about my cat who has been my consistent companion for many years.)

"Would you like to do an exercise?"

"Absolutely." I was excited and curious.

Ramsey first asked me to name three qualities I most admire about my pet. I named, "Patient, adaptable, and forgiving" (even though sometimes she ignores me for a while if I come home too late.)

How does it work? How does it feel? My mind raced between my casual attempts to communicate with my house plants, trees, and cat.



Ramsey said then to take each quality and put it into a statement of intent for my actions and how they may assist my day. She gave a sample construct:

Today, may I be courageous accepting whatever comes and open to insight that comes with it.

I began, but tears started to well up before I completed even the first statement.

Today, may I be patient with understanding others and accepting when patterns differ.

Today, may I be flexible with the needs of others—to flow with them for the good of the home versus fighting for my own preferences.

Today, may I be forgiving for unintentional slights, lack of attention, or unintended harm as I know the true resolve is friendship.

Ramsey suggested, "Say them each day—when you say it, most will feel the energy of the animal with them because these are the things they have taught us in the time they have been with us. When you do it, you are experiencing whole interspecies effect—a close connection with the animal and honoring the relationship with them. That's what it's like."

Healing protocols may differ, so Ramsey shared a bit about a session and her services. "When I do shamanic healing for people or for animals, I don't ask for a specific service. I consult with the person to determine why they are asking for a shamanic healing and if we are a good match energetically. When we have a healing session, I do a shamanic journey on behalf of the client, and it is my compassionate guiding spirits who determine what is needed and provide it. I am what we call a 'hollow bone.' I am the channel that is used to bring the subtle healing energies from one dimension to this one with conscious connection to spirit."

Whereas some energetic modalities will focus on reducing symptoms of a diagnosed dis-ease and then work toward re-establishing balance from the cause, shamanism attributes all illness to only three causes: loss of power, loss of soul or essence, and spiritual blockages or intrusions.

- A loss of power can occur when power is taken away, given away, or set aside.
- Loss of soul, or essence, may occur when someone experiences trauma. Ramsey elaborated, "When anyone has a trauma, a part of the soul leaves or is set aside so that the rest of the person's being can survive the ordeal. It usually takes with it qualities like trust, joy, or openness. Events like an emotional or physical traumatic event, shock, abuse, surgery, natural disaster, war, difficult birth, or even shouting can lead to soul loss. This may manifest as dissociation, PTSD, depression, illness, immune deficiency, addictions, unending grief, or even produce a coma."
- Spiritual blocks, or intrusions, are mostly self-induced negative thoughts. Ramsey clarified, "When most people think of intrusions, they are thinking of possession or something more serious. When a loss of soul becomes a chronic condition, we also lose power, that makes us vulnerable to intrusions—the negative thought patterns which are not a spirit of their own."

Ramsey also offers curse unraveling and compassionate de-possession, which she learned from Betsy Bergstrom. "Sometimes," she explained, "confused souls get lost and don't know what they're doing, so they look for the quickest shelter. Most are not evil and want to get home as badly as the host person wants to get them gone."

It's easy to imagine a run of bad luck or unfortunate circumstances as being a potential curse, possession, or a loss of personal power. Ramsey stays true to the intent of being the hollow bone without the responsibility of deciphering what a client needs. "I offer a free 20-minute session to talk. I work as a mediator to help people get what they need. It works better if we assume that they [any intrusive entities] are not evil. Then you can work with compassion, and it works faster and nicer. More respectful. No pain, no torture."

Whereas some energetic modalities will focus on reducing symptoms of a diagnosed dis-ease and then work toward re-establishing balance from the cause, shamanism attributes all illness to only three causes: loss of power, loss of soul or essence, and spiritual blockages or intrusions.

Support in life and support in the transition of death of the flesh, Ramsey assists with it all. One of her services is listed as "psycho-pomp" on her website. She explained, "Psycho-pomp is from Greek origins meaning 'accompanying the spirit.' It was a

traditional role of the shaman to teach/help people in their care to have a good death by living a good life. At end-of-life, it was the shaman that gathered the community to help the dying person cross the veil. As a chaplain and shamanic practitioner, I offer consultation, support for grief/loss and hospice services/ communication for animals and their people."

Ramsey also offers hospice communication and support for both an animal in transition and their person. This meshes with her interspecies counselor support services which serves to achieve balance in a person's and their animal companion's relationship.

When asked, if there was something others commonly misunderstand or misjudge in life that is hurting their own growth and peace, Ramsey addressed a prevalent ailment in society: "What first comes to mind are the negative words and thoughts we give ourselves...."

Take a class with Ramsey and you will assuredly get a cross-dimensional, cross-density collective consciousness educational experience. "My spirit guides and allies help. My primary teacher gives me the outlines for my classes. I still have to do the research, the slides, and actual teaching but she gives me the topics and the outlines, and I fill in the blanks. It's a good team." Ramsey beamed.

Ramsey politely explained in shamanism tradition, it is unwise to reveal the name or species of personal guides. She did, however, share, "She's [Her guide] been with me since I was three. I met her in my grandmother's iris garden." They reunited when Ramsey was in her 40s as her intuitive experiences blossomed.

Self-care is always of importance for a community caregiver. Ramsey shared, "First, I do my inner work. I regularly enroll in trainings with Christina Pratt, Alberto Villoldo, Rene Baribeau and others to stay 'fit' to support others. There's also daily spiritual practice, walks in nature, and connection with my guiding spirits. Then, the usual: rest, take time for myself to enjoy (I spin yarn and work with textiles) and to replenish energy. Cooking is a meditation for me. I also love to travel— China and New Zealand are on my bucket list, as is Argentina. I read extensively and garden."

My childhood memories of raising sheep warmed at her spinning comment. Did she also raise her own sheep? She seemed to chuckle at the thought. "I belong to a guild. Those folks raise the sheep. My life goal is to thin down the inventory. Over 50 years of spinning, it multiplies on its own!"

When asked, if there was something others commonly misunderstand or misjudge in life that is hurting their own growth and peace, Ramsey addressed a prevalent ailment in society: "What first comes to mind are the negative words and thoughts we give ourselves. Most people aren't aware that they can make themselves sick with this. The judgement and negativity that prevails in the current political environment is toxic and keeps everyone from moving forward."

Was there anything else she wanted to share? "Let me check in with my guides," Ramsey requested, then paused to listen. "They are letting me know, if I had to summarize, it's to bring people's awareness to their own power to create harmony between people and animals."

She continued, "Most humans hold themselves aside thinking animals are tools, inferior, or food. Likewise, they view other people as inferior—hold ourselves outside of human circles." She paused, letting the ideas swirl around her, the room, and the space between us.

"From animals, trees, and earth's perspectives, we are pretty small compared to everything else. The sooner we can accept our role—our part—the easier it will be to live. Consider walking among the rest of the world…the nature and the animals. We walk with them… not separate from them."

It seems Ramsey has already studied, taught, and experienced several lifetimes' worth and yet, I sensed her zest for learning and service were far from satiated. Not surprisingly, when asked about future goals, she has several already in the hopper.

"I want to develop classes for aging. I find it puzzling that no one can tell us how to age. It's unusual for someone to reach 100—which I fully intend to reach. Society leaves seniors on their own to age however they will. There isn't much support—social security and care facilities—nothing that treats seniors as people. I'd love to develop a class on how to age shamanically with spiritual practices that are grounded and practical. And it's starting to gather [momentum]."

Learn more about Judy Ramsey, her classes and services through her website judyramsey.net/ or social media pages: Facebook at Heart2HeartwithJudyRamsey and instagram.com/heart2heartwjudyramsey. To find an animal chaplain, visit findanimalchaplain.com/michigan/consult-with-an-animal-chaplain/judy-ramsey. You may also read past articles she's written at the Crazy Wisdom Community Journal home page.

Michelle McLemore is a freelance writer, energy wellness practitioner, stress management guide, and workshop presenter. Her background as a psychology and writing teacher supports personalizing client self-care for creating balance and enhancing vitality. Learn more at michellemclemore.com or facebook.com/MichelleMcLemoreHealingGuide.

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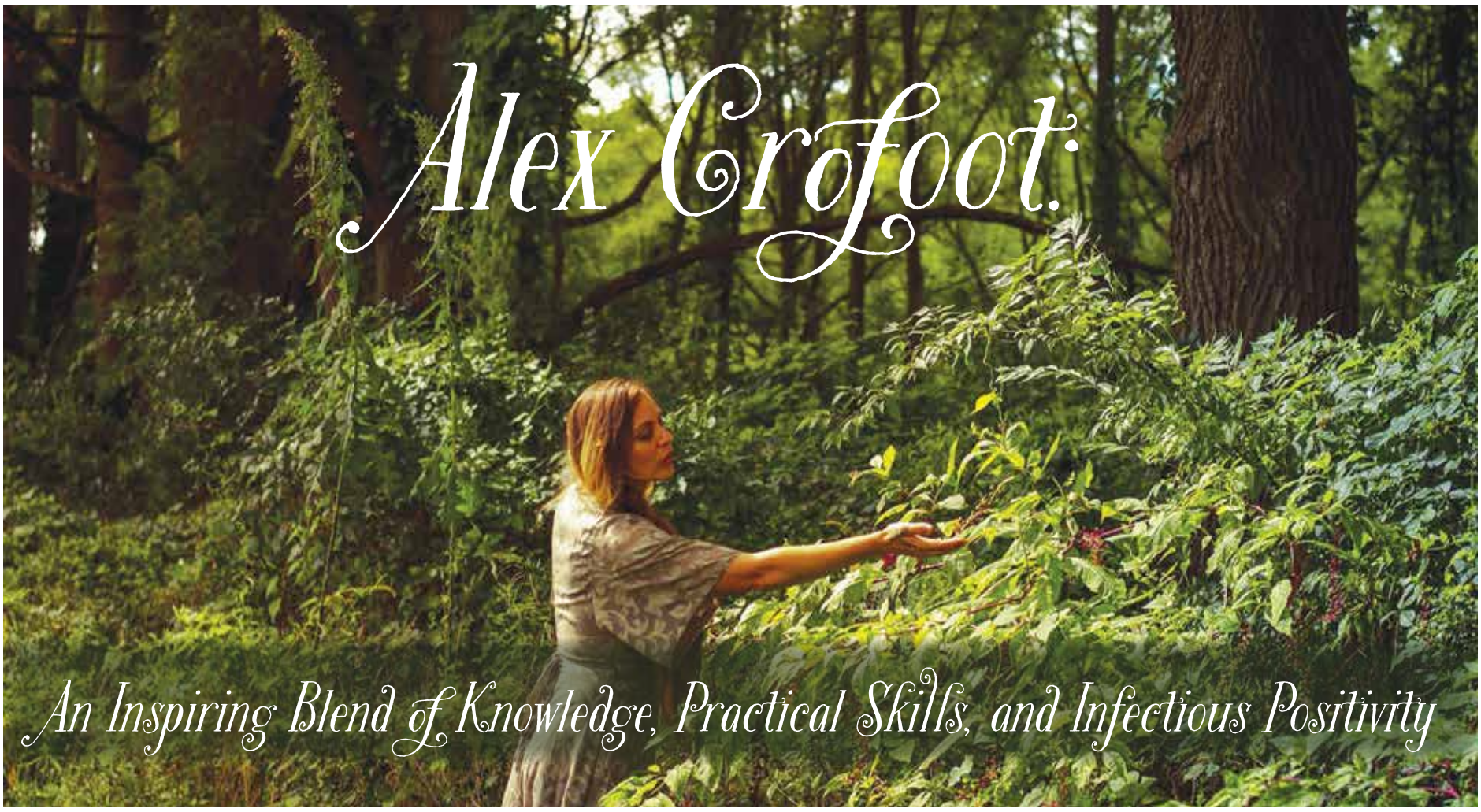

Alex Crofoot:

An Inspiring Blend of Knowledge, Practical Skills, and Infectious Positivity

By Leif Laufeyjarsen

Alex Crofoot, the owner of Bloodroot, an herb shop in Ypsilanti, originally hails from New York, where she learned herbalism from her grandmother. She is passionate about staying connected to her community and supporting reproductive health.

How did you come across the name "Bloodroot"? Isn't it a bit spooky?

Although it sounds spooky because it has "blood" in it, Bloodroot is actually my favorite spring ephemeral flower that is native to Michigan and parts of the Northeast. It has these beautiful leaves that are deeply veined and curl around themselves before opening to display a beautiful white flower. The funny part is that I have never harvested or used this plant medicinally. It is an at-risk plant, pollinated by ants, and needs shady woods to survive, so I leave it alone. I find the medicine of this plant to simply be its beauty and the fact that it exists. Every spring, I go to my known patches, sit, watch, and wait for the flower to bloom. It's a good reminder that we don't need to take or harvest everything for medicine. We can simply enjoy a plant's presence, and its beauty can be its own medicine.

> My great-grandmother was a huge influence, mostly because I think we are all made up of different parts of our ancestors. I come from a strong line of women.

How did your experiences with your southern great-grandmother shape your views on herbalism and reproductive care?

My great-grandmother, Leedona, was one of my favorite people. I feel really honored that I had a great-grandmother who lived until I was a teenager. Going to her house in the country as a child was a highlight. Her gardens and fresh food are a fond memory. Her mother was a midwife to the Chestnut Ridge people, a marginalized community in West Virginia. Doctors wouldn't provide them care, so her mother helped them deliver their babies and provided care. My great-grandmother would go with her to help, and of course, plants were being used at that time as pharmaceuticals were just developing. There is increasing and renewed recognition of Indigenous and ancestral healing practices, and community herbalists can play a vital role in uplifting their voices. I don't remember a lot of the details, but I remember the stories being told in the background when I was around, and I was intrigued—something inside of me lit up. My great-grandmother was a huge influence, mostly because I think we are all made up of different parts of our ancestors. I come from a strong line of women.

What does practicing herbalism as radical care mean to you? I'm sure many of us would benefit from a definition of "radical care."

When I think about caring for others in my community, I think about safety and sovereignty from hierarchical structures that cause power imbalances and leave people disempowered. I think about love and creating powerful acts of kindness that challenge systemic inequalities and create collective well-being. With rising healthcare costs and limited access to conventional medical services in many regions, community herbalists can serve as first-line wellness providers offering affordable and culturally relevant care.

Radical care recognizes that traditional models of care, like charity-based structures, reinforce power imbalances. Radical care emphasizes mutual aid,

solidarity (not charity), and shared responsibility within communities. We try to go beyond individual acts of kindness and create interconnection—holding space for others and being grounded in our communities. Care, like love, is not just a feeling: it is an action, a process, a practice, and an impact.

Radical care is not a one-time good deed or social service; it focuses on collective action and providing support that actively challenges existing institutions and power structures that continue to breed inequality.

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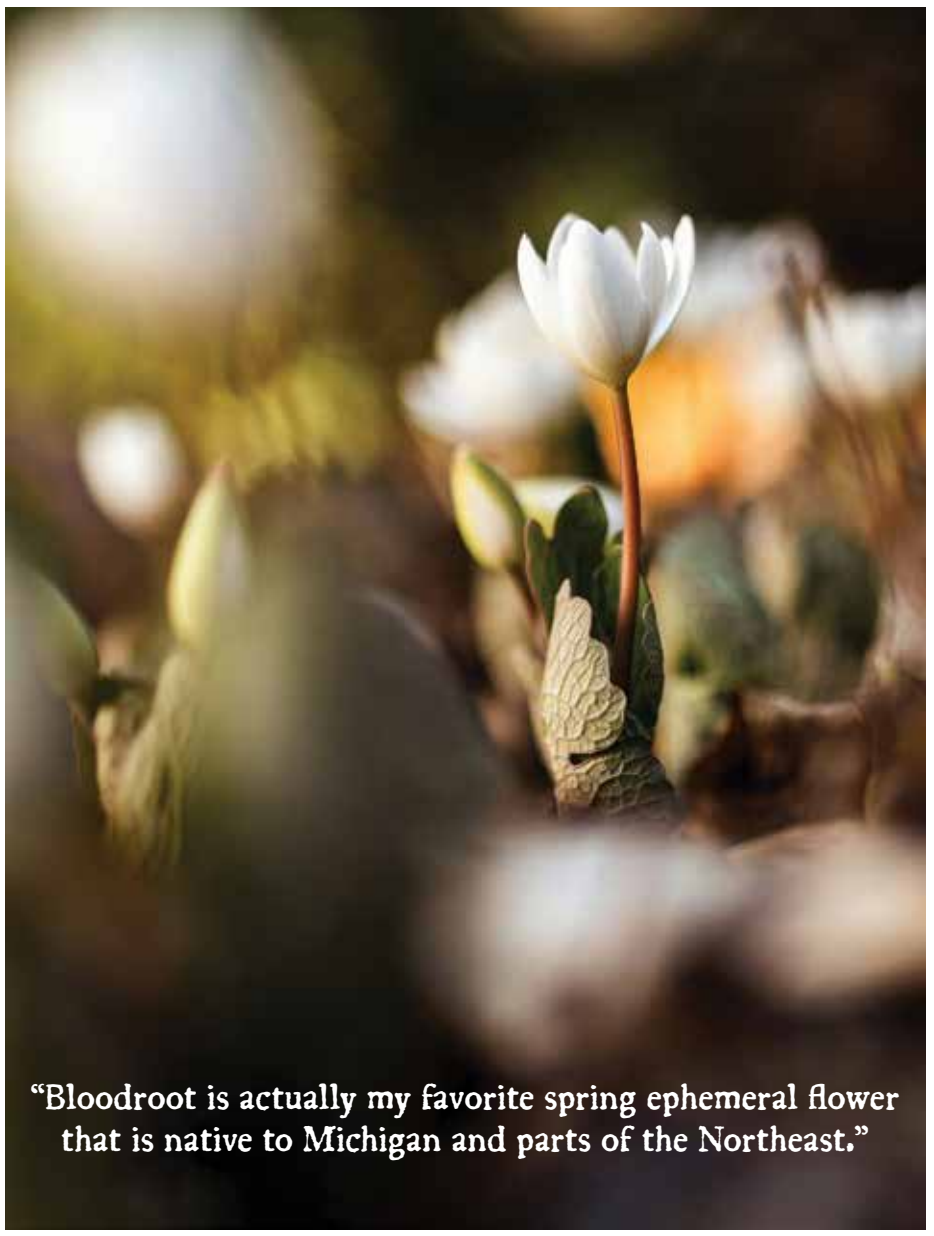

"Bloodroot is actually my favorite spring ephemeral flower that is native to Michigan and parts of the Northeast."

How do you envision the role of community herbalists evolving in the next few years, particularly in the context of healthcare accessibility and inclusivity?

Community herbalists are poised to become even more vital in fostering health sovereignty, increasing healthcare accessibility, and ensuring that traditional plant medicine remains a sustainable and inclusive resource for all. Their role will likely expand from individual practice to broader community-based wellness initiatives, education, and advocacy. Herbal medicine can complement conventional treatments, especially in underserved or rural areas where medical facilities are scarce. There is a growing movement toward integrative healthcare, where herbalists work alongside doctors, naturopaths, and nutritionists to provide holistic care.

As herbal medicine gains popularity, community herbalists will need to promote ethical wildcrafting, regenerative farming, and sustainable sourcing to prevent over harvesting and environmental degradation. Localized herbalism—growing and using regionally appropriate plants—will become increasingly important to reduce reliance on mass-market herbal products. Bioregional herbalism is using plants that grow in our backyards.

You have worked with a few very different communities in the past. What do you see as your "community," and what impact would you like to have on it?

This is an interesting question because I, like I'm sure everyone else, struggle with feeling a sense of belonging or even questioning what community is—or if I have one.

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But yeah, I am involved in a lot of different communities. I was an organic herb farmer in Dexter, Michigan for seven years and owned Black Locust Gardens, so I am (or was) part of the farming community in Washtenaw County. We were the first and only large-scale herb growers in Michigan until recently—now there is Golden Hour Herb Farm (yay!). I still have people come into the store and tell me about the plants they bought from our farm and how they are thriving. I love thinking about the thousands of native and medicinal plant starts we sold and how they are still growing, providing medicine and beauty to their ecosystems. In the spring, the shop still sells organic medicinal and native plant starts from Black Locust Gardens.

I am also part of the herbalist community in this area. Myself, Jim McDonald, Anna Ferendez, and others started the Great Lakes Herb Faire 11 years ago, which is a yearly weekend-long learning event in Chelsea, Michigan. I started the Community Care Camper, a free mobile herb clinic that provided care to the unhoused community in the area. Now, we provide free clinics here at the shop, along with mutual aid events.

I continue to provide accessible care through my one-on-one herbal consultations, classes, and the products sold at the store. I try to make people feel empowered around plants and herbs—I don't want it to feel intimidating. One of my mottos is, "You don't need a degree to help others; we are all capable of doing that."

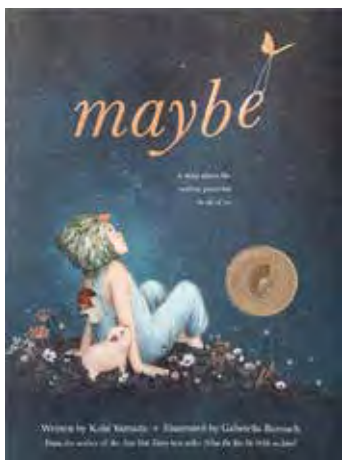
I am also part of the Ypsilanti small business community, the doula community, the radical reproductive care community, and others.

The only impact I hope to have is to mentor others who want to provide care through herbalism—whether that's through education, apprentice opportunities, starting an herb school, teaching folks how to grow, harvest, and make their own home apothecaries, or simply continuing to be kind and aligned with my values in the world.

Alex Crofoot teaches classes and hosts free events, such as a monthly Death Café, specialized herbal classes, and pagan celebrations. You can visit her at her shop, at 208 West Michigan Avenue where she has been since 2023 or find out more online at bloodrootherbshop.com.

The Crazy Wisdom Kids Section

You may purchase these books at shopcrazywisdom.com



A Chest Full of Words by Rebecca Gugger, Illustrated by Simon Röthlisberger

In this picture book packed with playful vocabulary, a young boy finds new words and discovers how to use them to change the world around him. Oscar discovers a magnificent treasure chest. When he opens it, he is disappointed at what's inside: nothing but words. What type of treasure is that?! But when he tosses fluorescent into the bushes, a bright yellow hedgehog runs by! Soon Oscar has created a featherlight backhoe, a docile crocodile, and a monstrous—oops!—adorable beetle. Using new words is fun!

Before long Oscar has emptied the chest and is left wordless. He doesn't know where to find more words, until his neighbor Louise gives him some guidance: you can find words anytime and anywhere. Oscar begins a new hunt for words and learns all sorts of inventive ways to describe the world around him. An enthralling, phenomenal, adventuresome, imaginative, endearing, ear-catching and joyful book about language that's sure to make kids laugh–and learn!

Maybe: A Story about the Endless Potential in All of Us by Kobi Yamada, Illustrated by Gabriella Barouch

You are the only you there ever has been or ever will be. You are unique in all the universe. Just the odds of you being here at this exact place and this exact time are so great and so rare that it will never happen again. Written by New York Times best-selling author Kobi Yamada, this is a story for everything you will do and everything you can be. It's a story about all the possibilities ahead of you. It's for who you are right now and it's for all the magical, unbounded potential you hold inside. With its beautiful visual storytelling and timeless message, Maybe is an inspiring story for kids of all ages.

The Flower Thief by Alice Hemming, Illustrated by Nicola Slater

"Hello brand new day.
Hello sunshine!
Hello lovely leaves.
Nice to see you back."

Spring is here and today a flower has sprung to life. But when Squirrel becomes too protective of it, Bird shows Squirrel the right way to let flowers blossom and grow.

The Secret of Moonrise Manor by Stephanie Bearce

A curious girl named Raven—think Wednesday Addams meets Sherlock Holmes—uses her budding skills as a mortician and a scientist to investigate an old and mysterious death at her small town's haunted hotel. Raven Gallows lives in a funeral home and is determined to become a famous detective. Her first case is one close to home—find the truth surrounding her mother's puzzling death six years ago. When a mummified man falls out of the wall at the Moonrise Manor Hotel, Raven is shocked to discover the body is clutching her mother's silver locket.

Raven gathers her friends—Cosmina Wilde, who thinks she can talk to ghosts, Miles Farnsworth, who works at the haunted hotel, and Eric Wong, who possesses unparalleled computer skills—and sets out to learn the identity of the mummy. As they follow the clues, they discover more than they bargained for, including a stash of stolen art and a legend of a secret society. The Secret of Moonrise Manor is a story about family, friendship, and the courage it takes to pursue the truth.

Year of the Meatball by Angela Calabrese

Joey Marconi's life in the Bronx covered all the bases-the best pizzeria on the planet, a winning baseball team, and Yankee Stadium just a pitcher's throw away. But when his family moves to the country, Joey slides into a major slump. To make matters worse, his Nonna's legendary meatballs are starting to taste lousy.
Then he meets Bobbi Ming-a baseball lover whose face and heart bear the scars of a tragic accident. Joey's not sure what to think of their budding friendship, but he relies on her to help navigate his new life-including school bullies, Nonna acting crazier than his curveball, and a trio of loveable llamas. There's a lot to figure out.

Joey and Bobbi make a strong team, but when Bobbi buckles under the weight of being teased, Joey must decide where his true loyalties lie—with his new friend, or the biggest baseball game of his life.

Conscious Parenting

Elimination Communication: Potty Training the Ancestral Way

By Kaili Brooks

For the modern toddler parent, potty training is an important—and often overwhelming—rite of passage. With an especially willful child, potty training can devolve into begging, bribing, breakdowns, and giving up. The common phrase repeated on modern mommy blogs and parenting influencers is to "wait until your toddler is ready!"

What this phrase means is largely unclear, but it boils down to "your toddler will decide when they want to use the potty, and you just need to wait it out." Recent studies have revealed that since the 1950s, the average age of potty training has risen from 18 months to 3.5 years; the biggest jump occurred between 2004 and 2024—the age of potty training, nearly doubling in the last 20 years as opposed to the 50-year span before 2004. With the advent of the disposable diaper, it has become far more convenient to let the child continue to use them until they decide not to, regardless of negative impacts in their development. It hasn't always been this way, and while diapers were commonplace before Pampers, they are also relatively new in terms of societal development. Before diapers, there was elimination communication (EC).

With an especially willful child, potty training can devolve into begging, bribing, breakdowns, and giving up.

In the simplest of terms, elimination communication is potty training from birth. Elimination refers to the releasing of urine and feces. Communication refers to the operant conditioning that is used to help your baby learn their elimination cues. Though elimination communication fell by the wayside in western society, many countries in Africa and Asia still practice this. For many of these societies, there is no question of whether or not a baby is ready to use the potty. If a baby isn't taught that wearing a toilet on their body is normal, they never have to unlearn it. Every single action a baby does is instinctual—including elimination. Changing diapers has become such an integral part of parenting that many, including myself before discovering EC, never wondered if overriding these instincts could result in negative consequences for their children.

Elimination communication sounds like a monumental task for those of us brought up with disposable diapers and it certainly can be in the beginning. Though the technique and method can always be discussed more intensely, the steps are actually quite simple, but that doesn't always mean easy! To properly initiate EC, mama and baby need to truly bond. This entails plenty of skin-to-skin contact, but breastfeeding and bedsharing are also beneficial. By doing this, you are ensuring that you are learning all of your baby's cues. Their hungry cry will sound different from their gassy cry. Perhaps they kick their legs to signal an incoming bowel movement. Every baby is different, which is why getting to know *your* baby is more important than following a step-by-step method. Parents often use a miniature top-hat shaped potty and hold it under their infant. In the early days, catching a pee or poop is a small victory, as you're missing more often than not. After a few days, the signals your baby gives before elimination become clearer and the communication aspect can be introduced. Every time your baby eliminates you will make a specific sound. A "ssssss" hiss is most common, but you can use any reliable noise. The same goes for poop, although many newborns will do both at the same time. Over time—and this can be relatively short—your baby will come to recognize that sound as their signal to eliminate. Obviously, you still need to be attentive to their cues or you will end up with more messes, but they become accustomed to eliminating in the potty from birth. Many parents choose to do combination EC, diapers while out or at night and EC during the day or other combinations. These babies may potty train later, but still incredibly early by today's standard. Most parents that utilize EC with their babies see them fully potty trained at or before 18 months.

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When deciding whether to delve into the world of EC or stick to diapers, there are positives and negatives. In terms of benefits for your child, EC can lead to better bowel control, decreased crying due to their instinctual needs being met, lower rates of constipation and urinary tract infections, and less diaper rash due to lower temperature around their genitals. Parents and caregivers can save money that would've been spent on diapers, skip the laundry associated with cloth diapers, and avoid the difficulty of an obstinate toddler who will only eliminate in a diaper. When you diaper a baby, you teach them to ignore their body's signals only to retrain them in two years. Simply put, EC just makes sense. EC is also incredibly eco-friendly compared to other diapering methods. Americans dispose of 3.75 million tons of diapers into landfills each year. Because diapers are almost entirely made of plastic and latex, these diapers will outlive all of us. Elimination communication is an excellent way to lower your footprint on Earth.

The biggest hurdle for most parents when integrating EC is time. It requires one or both partners to be constantly attentive to their infant at all hours of the day. Learning your baby's cues can be frustrating, and a missed cue may mean cleaning up pee or poop on top of every other newborn task. It is not always suitable for infants in daycare or for those whose parents lead busy lives. When doing partial EC, it may take longer for the "training" to work. As with any major parenting decision the answer is not the same for every family. The right option is what works for you and your children, but every parent deserves to know the full-scale of their choices. Whether you're planning for your first or seventh pregnancy and don't feel aligned with current diapering methods, consider that Elimination Communication may be the right path for you.

For more information about elimination communication and instinctual potty training, the book Go Diaper Free *by Andrea Olson is an excellent resource.*

Kaili Brooks is the calendar editor for The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal and a Secondary English student at Eastern Michigan University. She is passionate about natural living, intentional motherhood, and fiber arts. She resides in Ypsilanti with her husband and toddler son.

Kids in the Community

Abilities in Action: Resources and support for kids with special needs and their families

By Christine MacIntyre

Raising a child with special needs comes with unique challenges, but it also brings moments of incredible growth, resilience, and joy. The proper support and strategies can make all the difference—whether it's navigating therapies, advocating at school, or creating a home environment where a child feels empowered. From practical tips to expert insights, community groups and carefully curated summer camps and classes, special needs children and their families will not just get by but will truly thrive. Every child deserves the chance to shine, and every family deserves the tools to help them do it.

Arbor Autism Center

Arbor Autism Center is a place where children with autism build confidence, develop essential skills, and experience meaningful growth through hands-on engaging therapy. In social skills groups, kids learn concepts such as sharing, making eye contact, and following social skills through collaborative building, art, cooking, vocational skills, video and/or board gaming, and storytelling. In the pool, Arbor Swims provides a structured, sensory-friendly approach to water safety, helping children feel comfortable and secure while learning essential swimming skills under the guidance of a certified therapist. For those with feeding challenges, Arbor Eats introduces new foods through gradual exposure, reducing anxiety around mealtimes and fostering independence. Speech and language therapy supports children in developing clear communication, whether through articulation, fluency, or expressive language. Each program is designed to help children apply these skills beyond the therapy room, creating a foundation for success in everyday life. At Arbor, every step forward is a step toward greater independence, confidence, and joy.

Arbor Autism Center is located at 850 South Hewitt Road, Ypsilanti. For more information, please call (734) 544-5561 or visit arborautismcenters.com.

The Work and Play Special Needs Resource Center

The Work and Play Special Needs Resource Center is a vibrant hub where individuals with disabilities and their families find support, connection, and opportunities to thrive. The Center creates a truly inclusive space through movement programs, advocacy, and educational resources.

DanceABILITIES and CheerABILITIES bring the joy of performance to participants of all abilities. DanceABILITIES, led by University of Michigan senior Megan Loren, focuses on creative movement and self-expression. The Center's founder, Misty Kluck, said Loren uses visual cues, repetition, and adaptive techniques enabling inclusion for all abilities in a fun, supportive environment. CheerABILITIES, a co-ed team for ages 8—99, builds confidence through teamwork, stretching, stunting (adapted as needed), and choreographed routines. Athletes learn at their own pace while being encouraged to step outside their comfort zone and challenge themselves. "They recently had their first public performance at the DD Hero Walk and loved every moment of being in front of a cheering crowd!" said Kluck.

The Work and Play Center also offers educational workshops and IEP Office Hours providing families with expert-led guidance on Special Needs Trusts, Guardianship, Medicaid, SSI, housing, and school advocacy. Workshops rotate based on community needs, always empowering families with knowledge.

From sensory-friendly movie nights to inclusive social events, The Center is dedicated to creating a welcoming space where everyone is valued and celebrated.

Work and Play Special Needs Resource Center, Inc. is located at 444 North Hewitt Road, Ypsilanti. For more information, please call (734) 780-6795 or visit workandplaycenter.org.

Exceptional Journeys Community Center

EXCEPTIONAL JOURNEYS
A COMMUNITY FOR ALL ABILITIES

At Exceptional Journeys Community Center, no one walks the path alone. As a newly approved day program contracted with Washtenaw County Community Mental Health, Exceptional Journeys is designed to support individuals of all ages and abilities through programming and ensuring families can access the necessary resources. "If there's a service we don't offer, I'll do my best to guide families to the right resources in the area," said Founder Zee Kennedy.

The program offers hands-on experiences like cooking classes, social skills development, and skill-building sessions, all tailored to help participants grow in confidence and independence and build lasting friendships. Beyond these activities, Exceptional Journeys is about creating a strong support system. "We want families to know they are not alone," Kennedy emphasized. By spreading awareness and connecting families with the right tools, Exceptional Journeys is helping to build a more inclusive and supportive community, one step at a time.

Exceptional Journeys Community Center is located at 3060 Packard Street # B in Ann Arbor. For more information, please call (734) 216-3375 or visit exceptionaljourneys.org.

Therapeutic Riding, Inc.

Therapeutic Riding, Inc. (TRI) is an adaptive equestrian center where people with various disabilities learn how to care for and ride horses. It's a place where they can feel strong, independent, and, more importantly, have fun. "Our participants list a number of reasons why they love working with horses—exercise, socialization, relaxation—but most of all, you'll hear them say that riding is just pure fun!" said Program Direct Jennifer Beyer. With gentle, well-trained horses, patient instructors, and a team of dedicated volunteers, TRI helps kids build a real sense of freedom in the saddle. Beyer said participants set goals, improve balance, gain confidence, develop independence, and more. Whether they're riding for recreation or sport, the experience is empowering, exciting, and unique.

For more information, call (734) 677-0303 or visit therapeuticridinginc.org. Therapeutic Riding, Inc. is located at 3425 East Morgan Road, Ann Arbor.

JUMP-IN Therapy & Wellness Center

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Jump-IN is a lifelong resource for individuals of all ages, from birth through adulthood. Specializing in a wide range of conditions, including sensory processing and regulation disorders, ADD, trauma, and motor skill delays, Jump-IN provides personalized care to help individuals thrive. Owner Jackie Kilburn added that they also provide physical restoration for "things that stick and squeak," such as muscles or joints.

"We service birth through aging," said Kilburn. "We treat the mother-baby dyad from conception through birth and postpartum addressing feeding issues and releasing tension." Uterine misalignment is treated externally, craniosacral therapy is used to aid recovery from abdominal surgeries, hysterectomies, and adhesions, and functional microcurrent to treat musculoskeletal injury and pain.

One of Jump-IN's programs is a two-week, half-day intensive therapy camp where parents actively participate to learn techniques they can implement at home. "Camp is fun, and clients typically make huge gains in this short and intensive program," Kilburn shared.

In addition to in-person therapy, Jump-IN supports families with home programs for children and adults, allowing progress to continue outside the clinic. Kilburn has also patented a soft handle for the Wilbarger Deep Touch Pressure Program, a tool that assists with sensory regulation, which is available for purchase through the clinic.

Jump-IN is a trusted partner for special needs families, providing hands-on therapy, home-based solutions, and innovative tools to help individuals of all ages build strength, independence, and confidence.

Please call (810) 231-9042 or visit facebook.com/jumpintherapy/ for more information. JUMP-IN Therapy & Wellness Center is located at 10400 Hamburg Road, Hamburg.

Ann Arbor Rec & Ed

Inclusion is a commitment that Ann Arbor Rec & Ed focuses on. Regardless of ability, every child deserves the chance to play, learn, and be part of a community. Ann Arbor Rec & Ed works closely with families to provide accommodations that ensure all kids can fully participate in youth classes, sports leagues, summer camps, and aftercare programs.

Alongside inclusive offerings, Rec & Ed also provides adapted programs designed specifically for individuals with disabilities. "Our team will make every effort to ensure that all qualifying participants receive the assistance they need to fully participate in activities to the best of their ability," said Engagement Coordinator Elyse Bairley.

One of the most beloved programs is Strike Force Bowling, a non-competitive league running strong for over 30 years. Open to participants from ninth grade through adulthood, it offers a relaxed, supportive environment where everyone can bowl at their own pace. Family members and aides are welcome, while staff and volunteers provide extra support as needed. Each season wraps up with a pizza party and awards for all—because at Rec & Ed, showing up and having fun is the biggest win.

For families looking for inclusive recreational opportunities, Rec & Ed encourages contacting Elyse Bairley, Engagement Coordinator (bairley@a2schools.org), to discuss accommodations, upcoming programs, or even ways to get involved as a volunteer. More details can also be found at aarecedonline.com.For more information, please call (734) 994-2300 or visita2schools.org/reced. Ann Arbor Rec & Ed is located at 1515 South Seventh Street in Ann Arbor.

We Rock The Spectrum Kid's Gym

For many children with autism and sensory processing disorders, the world can feel overwhelming—too loud, too bright, and too unpredictable. Traditional playgrounds or play centers may not be designed with their needs in mind, making it difficult for them to engage safely and comfortably. That's exactly why We Rock the Spectrum Gym exists—to provide a space where all children, regardless of ability, can move, play, and be themselves.

Robin Hall, owner of We Rock the Spectrum in Ann Arbor and a mother of a child with special needs, understands firsthand the importance of a judgment-free play space. As a busy working mom in the corporate world, she once took her child to a play center while catching up on work nearby. But instead

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Abilities in Action: Resources and support for kids with special needs and their families

of enjoying himself, her son was repeatedly scolded for the way he played. "While the way he was playing was perhaps a little disruptive, he wasn't hurting anyone. Me explaining that he's on the spectrum didn't matter," she recalled.

Frustrated and stressed, she searched for a play space to accommodate his needs. When she couldn't find one, she opened Michigan's first We Rock the Spectrum location, ensuring that kids of all abilities would have a place to play freely, safely, and without judgment.

We Rock the Spectrum offers open, inclusive play areas equipped with therapy swings, zip sliders, a roller slide, and specialized activities designed to support movement and sensory regulation. They also have a rock climbing wall, monkey bars, and several other components that inspire movement. A calming space is also available for kids who need a break, with noise-canceling headphones and self-regulation tools to help them reset.

Hall encourages parents to let their children play in ways that feel right to them, even if it doesn't look like typical play. "As long as they're happy, safe, and not hurting anyone, I don't see a problem with it," she said. While showing children the intended uses for certain toys or playthings may be helpful, let them be creative and play how they need to experience the world. She also urges parents to observe how their child naturally reacts to stress. "Meltdowns are fight-or-flight responses. Understanding how your child processes stress can help you communicate with them more effectively." When given the right environment, all kids—neurodivergent and neurotypical alike—can thrive.

For more information, please call (734) 623-9422 or visit their website, werockthespectrumannarbor.com. We Rock the Spectrum's Ann Arbor kid's gym is located at 4370 Varsity Drive, Suite A.

Creating Brighter Futures

For families navigating the challenges of autism and developmental delays, Creating Brighter Futures transcends the typical therapy center; it's a place of understanding, growth, and empowerment.

"Our goal is not to change or 'fix' the kids that come to our program," said Jessica Irish, a board-certified behavior analyst, licensed behavior specialist, and Creating Brighter Futures Co-Owner and Clinical Director. "We meet them where they are and provide support to improve their quality of life."

At its core, Creating Brighter Futures offers one-on-one Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, a science-based approach that helps individuals develop positive behaviors and life skills. They also offer summer social skills groups, yet what truly sets it apart is its family-centered approach. Irish stressed the importance of looking at whole family units rather than focusing only on the child. Parents and caregivers are instrumental in creating meaningful, individualized goals—helping a child communicate, dress independently, try new foods, or confidently engage in school and community activities.

Because traditional learning methods don't always work, Irish said it often takes creativity and tailoring strategies to each child's needs. At Creating Brighter Futures, weekly family meetings ensure caregivers are equipped with effective techniques, fostering progress beyond therapy sessions.

"In the end, our goal is to work ourselves out of a job," Irish shared. "We want the kids and their families to have the tools to tackle any obstacle."

For more information, please call (734) 926-0740 or visit creatingbrighterfutures.com. Creating Brighter Futures is located at 4201 Varsity Drive, Ann Arbor.

Go Like the Wind Montessori

Go Like the Wind is an authentic Montessori school serving infants through middle school children. The Montessori method is a child-centered educational approach that values the human spirit and the whole child's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Their school can accommodate many different learning styles with a low student-to-teacher ratio, self-paced curriculum, and individualized work plans. Students learn by doing many hands-on activities and are free to move about (an advantage to those who require a high level of physical activity). Students can learn at their own pace without pressure to meet formal standards by a predetermined time. The school also has access to public school therapy services.

For more information, please call (734) 747-7422 or visit montessori.wlps.net. Go Like the Wind Montessori is located at 8845 Main Street in Whitmore Lake.

Brain Injury Association of Michigan

Caring for a child with special needs comes with unique challenges—one of which may be navigating the complexities of a brain injury. The Brain Injury Association of Michigan (BIAMI) ensures that no one has to face those challenges alone.

"A brain injury can change a life in an instant," said Jenna Anheuser, BIAMI's program coordinator. But, she reiterated, with the right resources and support, families can confidently navigate the road ahead.

Through its Information & Referral Line, BIAMI helps families connect with specialized medical care, rehabilitation services, and support groups. Whether finding the right school accommodations or accessing essential therapies, the organization provides guidance tailored to each family's needs.

Education is a major focus. Anheuser emphasized the importance of individuals, families, and professionals accessing the latest information. BIAMI offers workshops and programs to help parents, educators, and medical professionals better understand brain injuries, their impact, and best practices for recovery. The organization also advocates for policies that ensure children with brain injuries receive the care and services they deserve.

Prevention plays a key role in BIAMI's work, particularly through the Lids for Kids program, which provides children with free, properly fitted bike helmets. The organization also works to increase concussion awareness recently partnering with the University of Michigan and other institutions on grants to improve concussion education and prevention.

For families seeking answers, resources, or simply a community that understands, BIAMI is a lifeline. Anheuser said they are committed to making lasting impacts on families who are navigating the complex challenges that may come with brain injury.

For more information, please call (810) 229-5880 or visit biami.org. The Brain Injury Association of Michigan is located at 7305 Grand River, Suite 100, Brighton.

Camp SkyWild

At Camp SkyWild, summer camp isn't about making kids fit the world—it's about making the world fit them. Designed specifically for neurodivergent kids, adults, and their families, Camp SkyWild offers an experience where every camper is celebrated for exactly who they are. Too often, families with neurodivergent kids are left out of traditional programming. However, Executive Director Erin Ross said their mission is to change that by providing special needs families access to the programming available to their peers.

What sets Camp SkyWild apart? It starts with exceptional camper-to-staff ratios, ensuring personalized attention and support. Every counselor undergoes intensive training in neurodiversity, inclusion, and adaptive support, creating a safe, welcoming space where campers can truly thrive. Activities, schedules, and environments are carefully adapted to individual needs, ensuring every camper can fully participate—modifying sensory experiences, adjusting social interactions, or providing structured transitions.

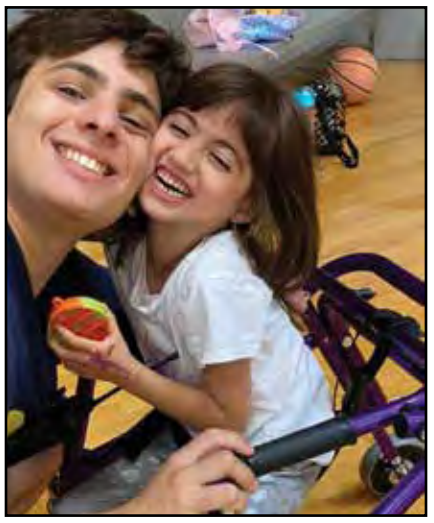
Camp SkyWild isn't just for kids. From Club SkyWild, a monthly social club for neurodivergent adults, to SkyWild Summit, a skill-building retreat, the camp offers programs that support individuals at every stage of life. Families are part of the experience, too, with weekend camps designed for parents, siblings, and caregivers to build connections and community.

Perhaps most importantly, Camp SkyWild is working to create lasting change. Beyond its own programs, Ross said it provides training and consulting to help other organizations better serve neurodivergent communities and "to help other organizations create more inclusive spaces."

From overnight summer camps to overnight weekend family camps, summits, and monthly social clubs, Camp SkyWild is an exciting space for special needs families to learn, grow, and thrive together.

Please call (734) 436-1453 or visit campskywild.org for more information. Camp SkyWild is located at YMCA Camp Timbers, 3269 Horseshoe Lake Road, West Branch.

Friendship Circle



Friendship Circle of Michigan is a community of support, inclusion, and real friendships for individuals with special needs and their families. Through over 40 weekly, monthly, and seasonal programs, Friendship Circle provides a nurturing space where participants can grow socially, physically, and cognitively through interactive play, engaging activities, and hands-on workshops.

"At Friendship Circle, we encourage you to 'find your circle,'" Director of Programs Elisabeth Lockwood said. "Friendship Circle provides your family with a supportive community that gives you the opportunity to form real friendships within a non-judgmental environment."

Programs are designed to support every aspect of development. Art and music programs foster creativity through painting, sculpture, and music-making, while sports and fitness programs promote movement and health with adapted games and activities. Social and recreational programs help children build friendships in a welcoming setting, and life skills programs encourage independence through cooking, gardening, and money management. For those eager to learn, educational programs provide hands-on experiences in STEM, language arts, and more.

Friendship Circle isn't just for kids—it's for parents, too. Raising a child with special needs comes with unique challenges, and the parent program provides a space to connect, celebrate, and thrive with other parents who understand the journey. From coffee meet-ups to themed gatherings, parents can share experiences, seek advice, and build lasting friendships in a community that supports and celebrates every triumph big or small.

When summer rolls around, Rubin Family Summer Camp allows children to make memories, build friendships, and embrace adventure. Families can choose between a day camp, which blends fun and learning, or an overnight camp, where kids experience the joy of independence in a supportive environment.

No matter the program, Friendship Circle works individually with each family to ensure every child and parent finds belonging, encouragement, and the friendships they deserve.

Please call (248) 788-7878 or visit friendshipcircle.org for more information. Friendship Circle's facilities are located at 6892 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield.

FAR Therapeutic Arts and Recreation

Since 1951, FAR Therapeutic Arts and Recreation has been transforming the lives of kids with disabilities through the power of music, art, dance/movement, and recreation. Unlike traditional therapies, FAR nurtures the whole child, helping them overcome physical, intellectual, and emotional barriers while developing new skills, confidence, and friendships. Last year, FAR reached over 1,600 individuals through private and group therapies. However, according to FAR President Pamela Ayres, FAR is more than just therapy—it's a place where

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kids and families find a true sense of belonging. "It's really something our clients and their families give to us—and to each other," she said. "A place that is safe, precious, and powerful." One parent shared, "They make it fun … they'll start with where you are and just know how to develop it."

FAR's programs make therapy both engaging and empowering. According to Ayres, music Therapy offers exciting classes like Friends with Rhythm, FAR Fusion Band, and Chime In, where participants develop musical skills while building confidence and connection.

Dance/Movement Therapy brings energy and social fun through the Social Dance Club while Recreation and Sports Therapy fosters teamwork and friendship with programs like Social Connections and the FAR Bowling Team.

Camp Sing Out is a musical theater inclusion camp for those who dream of the stage. It is a place where teens and young adults with disabilities experience the magic of show business. From singing and acting to mastering theater terms and costume design, campers immerse themselves in every aspect of a production. The grand finale? A full-scale performance where they shine in front of a live audience celebrating their creativity and hard work.

FAR Therapeutic Arts and Recreation is located at 1669 West. Maple Road, Birmingham. For more information, please call (248) 646-3347 or visit far-therapy.org.

Practical Strategies to Help Kids (and Parents) Thrive

Raising a child with special needs is a journey filled with rewarding moments and unique hurdles, particularly regarding communication and behavior, but small shifts in how we interact with our kids can make a big difference.

Say What You Want to See
When a child engages in challenging behavior, it's natural to focus on what not to do—"Stop yelling!" or "Don't throw your food!" But Jessica Irish, board-certified behavior analyst, licensed behavior specialist, and Co-Owner and Clinical Director of Creating Brighter Futures, explained that children respond more positively when given clear, direct instructions instead. "Instead of [saying] 'stop yelling,' you could say 'use your inside voice.' Or rather than 'don't throw your food,' you could say, 'tell me you are all done,'" she suggested. By shifting directions from negative to positive, children learn what's expected of them in a way that's easier to understand.

Make Instructions Clear and Simple
For children with communication delays, long or complex instructions can be overwhelming. "Saying, 'It's time to put your shoes on so we can go to the park and play with our friends,' might be too many words or too much information for a child to process and understand," Irish explained. Instead, she recommended keeping it short and clear, like "First shoes, then park." Using fewer words reduces confusion and frustration, making it easier for children to follow directions.

Give Choices Instead of Asking Questions
If a task has to be done, phrasing it as a question can backfire. When you ask, 'Will you brush your teeth?' you're giving the child the option to say no. Instead, Irish recommended presenting the task as a statement with built-in choices: "Do you want to brush your teeth now or in five minutes?" This way, the child feels a sense of control while still understanding that the task isn't optional.

Prioritize Your Well-Being
Caring for a child with special needs can be exhausting, and many parents put themselves last, but a parent can't pour from an empty cup. Irish encouraged parents to rethink self-care, emphasizing that it doesn't have to mean a spa day or a vacation. "It might be taking an extra five minutes in the hot shower or waking up 20 minutes early so that you can have a cup of coffee in silence," she said. She also urged parents to reach out for help when they need it. "Ask friends or family members to help with childcare so you can go to the grocery store alone or go out to dinner with your spouse."

Self-care isn't selfish—it's necessary. "Many families tell me they don't have the time for self-care," said Irish. However, she reiterated that taking care of yourself is essential so that you are in the best possible position to take care of your child—much like the "airplane analogy when we are told to put your mask on first and then help those around you."

By making small changes in how we communicate and care for ourselves, we can create a more positive and manageable daily life for our children and ourselves.

Summer Fun for Special Needs Families

Big Blue Swim School

As summer approaches, parents look for activities that keep kids active, engaged, and learning—and swim lessons are a perfect fit. At Big Blue Swim School Ann Arbor, children of all abilities, including those with special needs,

can benefit from customized swim instruction tailored to their unique learning styles. "We encourage parents of special needs children to discuss their child's specific requirements with our instructors," said General Manager Nate Kushion. "This way, we can tailor our lessons to meet each child's individual needs." By fostering open communication with parents, Big Blue ensures a positive and supportive environment where kids can build confidence, improve motor skills, and develop essential water safety techniques. Swimming not only provides a fun way to stay cool in the summer but also promotes physical fitness and lifelong safety skills. "We're here to support all families and make sure every child has the opportunity to learn and enjoy swimming."

Big Blue Swim School Ann Arbor is located at 914 West Eisenhower Parkway, Ann Arbor. Please call (734) 545-8451 or visit bigblueswimschool.com for more information.

Blue Heron Bay Spray Park

Splash pads offer a splash of fun for everyone, providing an inclusive, sensory-friendly way for special needs kids to cool off and enjoy the summer. Independence Lake's Blue Heron Bay Spray Park is a summer paradise with a water play structure, slides, jet spider, and more, plus shady pavilions, tasty concessions, and fun for all ages.

Independence Lake County Park Blue Heron Bay Spray Park is located at 3200 Jennings, Whitmore Lake and can be reached at (734) 449-4437 or by visiting their website at washtenaw.org/424/Independence-Lake-Park.

Lily Pad Springs

Another option is Lily Pad Springs, Michigan's largest splash pad. Its 5,500 sq. ft. has over 50 play features, four water slides, a splash bucket, and full ADA accessibility for all ages and abilities.

Lily Pad Springs is located at 6200 Farmington Road, West Bloomfield. Please call (248) 451-1900 or visit wbparks.org/parks-facilities/lily-pad-springs for more information.

Kirksey Recreation Center

The Kirksey Recreation Center's indoor aquatic area offers 6,500 square feet of water-filled adventure for all ages. Whether you're looking to relax, play, or get active, there's something for everyone. Start at the zero-depth entry, where sprays and geysers create a playful water playground. Float along the lazy river on an inner tube, unwind in the warm, bubbling spa, or get some laps in at the four-lane warm-up pool. A water slide satisfies thrill-seeking swimmers. Livonia's outdoor options include Botsford Pool, Shelden Pool, and Clements Circle Splash Park. Whether indoors or outdoors, Livonia Parks & Recreation has plenty of ways to make a splash. Livonia Parks & Recreation superintendent Ted Davis said they are ready to assist! "We are here to help; we want to create an environment that is as open and inclusive as we can." Recreation Center staff are KultureCity-certified, meaning they have received training on sensory needs and how to engage with individuals with sensory needs. Davis said they welcome kids of all abilities—"We *all* want to be outdoors. We *all* want to swim! Who *wouldn't* want to do those things, especially when it's hot outside?"

Livonia Parks & Recreation's Kirksey Recreation Center is located at 15100 Hubbard, Livonia. For more information, please call (734) 466-2900 or visit livonia.gov/1960/parks-recreation.

Centennial Playground at Gallup Park

The Rotary Club of Ann Arbor Centennial Playground at Gallup Park is a universal access playground where children of all abilities can play and grow together. Featuring a fairy-tale theme and three distinct play areas inspired by

Michigan's natural environments, the playground is tailored to support skill development, including coordination, balance, and strength. What sets it apart for special needs kids is the combination of accessible ramps, topography changes, and wide sidewalks, ensuring every child, regardless of ability, can explore and engage with family and friends. Additionally, the playground provides a positive sensory experience, and its inclusive design makes it a perfect place for caregivers with disabilities to play and interact with their children.

Centennial Playground at Gallup Park is located at 3000 Fuller Road, Ann Arbor. Please call (734) 794-6240 or visit a2gov.org/parks-and-recreation/parks-and-places/universal-access-playground/ for more information.

DNR's Outdoor Adventure Center

The DNR's Outdoor Adventure Center (OAC) brings Michigan's wilderness to life with interactive exhibits like walking behind a waterfall, stepping into a fishing boat, and hitting the trail on a mountain bike or snowmobile. Learn how the DNR manages our forests, wildlife, and fish as you climb a Bur oak tree, explore an airplane, and discover the creatures in the aquarium. With sensory-friendly options, a quiet room, and KultureCity-certified staff, the OAC is the perfect place for everyone to dive into Michigan's outdoor adventures.

The OAC hosts sensory-friendly days throughout the year, offering a quieter, more relaxed experience for visitors. On these days, the center will feature lower volume, sensory materials, and a welcoming environment for all.

The DNR's Outdoor Adventure Center is located at 1801 Atwater Street, Detroit. Please call (844) 622-6367 for more information or visit michigan.gov/oac.

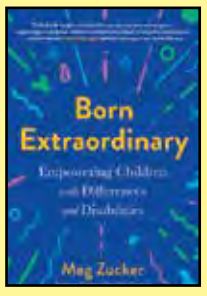
Page-Turners with Purpose: Must-Read Books for Special Needs Families

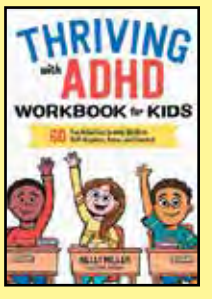
Born Extraordinary: Empowering Children with Differences and Disabilities by Meg Zucker is a powerful guide for parents on raising confident, resilient children who embrace their differences and thrive.

Button Pusher by Tyler Page is a heartfelt and eye-opening graphic memoir about a boy with ADHD learning to navigate a world that doesn't always understand him.

Rebekah Taussig's lyrical, thought-provoking memoir-in-essays *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* redefines disability, challenging stereotypes and celebrating the richness of an unconventional life.

Thriving with ADHD Workbook for Kids: 60 Fun Activities to Help Children Self-Regulate, Focus, and Succeed, by Kelli Miller LCSW MSW, is a strength-based workbook filled with practical exercises to help kids understand and manage their ADHD, from building self-control and focus to improving social skills and confidence, empowering them to flourish at home, school, and beyond.





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Green Living

No Matter Where You Go, You Are in a Watershed!

By S.K. Rosina Newton

A watershed is all the area of land that drains into a particular river. Whenever it rains or the snow melts, those water drops soak back into earth or travel across land to join their kin in the nearest creek or tributary.

I've spent four decades of my life in the environmental field, and I am delighted to be learning more now about the ecological intersection of land and water.

Our Southeast Michigan watersheds are the Huron River, Rouge River, Clinton River, River Raisin, and Ecorse Creek Watersheds. All of these nets of nomadic water empty into the Detroit River (which has its own watershed). Detroit River waters flow into Lake Erie, then travel through the Niagara River merging into Lake Ontario, narrowing again into the St. Lawrence River, and releasing finally into the Atlantic Ocean.

For the past two years, I have been working for Friends of the Rouge which is a nonprofit whose mission is to "restore, protect, and enhance the Rouge River watershed." Our sister organizations, such as the Huron River Watershed Council, are likewise working for clean water. I've spent four decades of my life in the environmental field, and I am delighted to be learning more now about the ecological intersection of land and water. Looking back, I realize that my life's work has been shaped in part by growing up exploring Greens Bayou in Houston (my hometown watershed).

Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi said, *"I know the joy of fishes in the river through my own joy as I go walking along the same river."*

Imagine how all these networks of waterways provide habitat for countless life forms in and out of the water: fish, plants, insects, wildlife, macroinvertebrates, humans, and microscopic life. The web of life relying on these ever-flowing bodies of water is diverse, beautiful, and extensive.

Now we can also imagine everything we do on land affects the quality of this watery world. The bad news is humans create pollution no matter how hard we try not to. The good news is we humans also have the power to reduce the amount and severity of the pollution we generate.

The web of life relying on these ever-flowing bodies of water is diverse, beautiful, and extensive.

In the past, industries were the major polluters. The Cuyahoga River in Ohio (which empties into Lake Erie) was so polluted from industrial wastes that it caught on fire at least a dozen times going back as far as 1868 and continuing for 100 years. Even the Rouge River caught on fire in 1969. This is a perfect example of *point source pollution*: it comes from one point.

"The public outcry over these river fires and other polluted waterways helped lead to the passage of the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, the 1972 Clean Water Act, the 1972 U.S.—Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and the 1973 Endangered Species Act," said Detroit River champion John Hartig in *Great Lakes Now.* Hartig is author of eight books including *Rouge River Revived: How People are Bringing their River Back to Life.*

Now, thanks to the Clean Water Act, point source pollution is greatly reduced from 50 years ago. Industries and entities whose effluent dumps into surface waters must have a permit and are regulated.

However, we still have a long way to go before all our rustbelt waterways are swimmable, drinkable, and fishable. The Rouge River is still a victim of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) for example. Combined sewers are old systems that work fine during dry weather. However, during rainstorms, they become overburdened and dump untreated sewage directly into the river. A surprising number of our communities have CSOs: Birmingham, Bloomfield Village, Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Detroit, Inkster, Livonia, Redford Twp, and River Rouge.

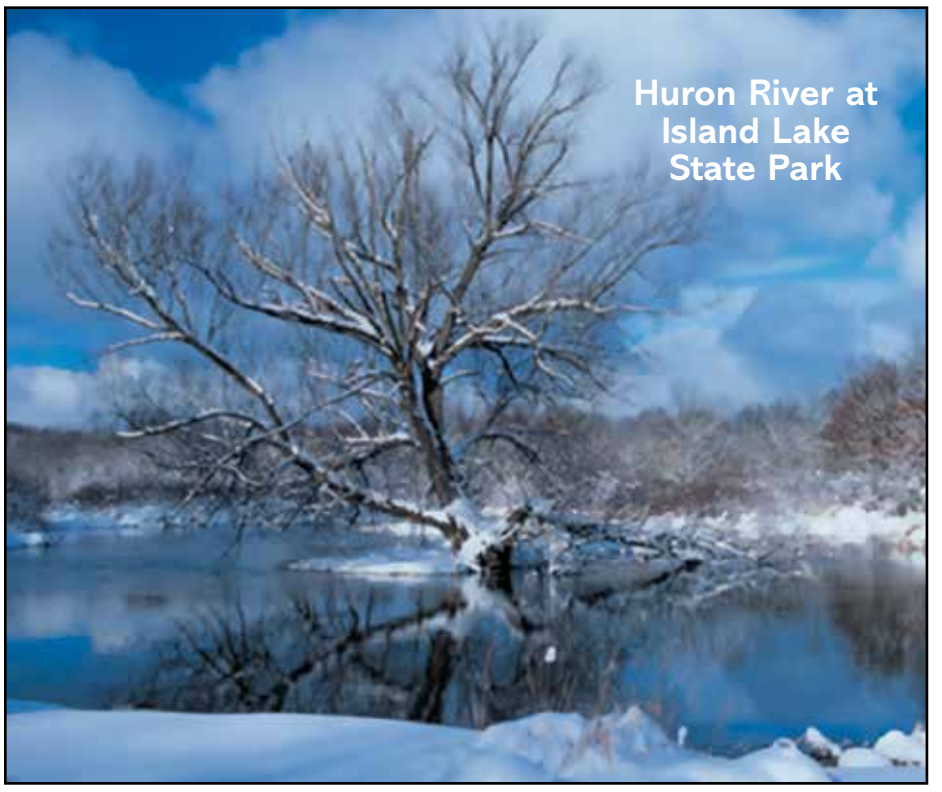
Another obstacle to healthy rivers today is *nonpoint source pollution*—pollution that comes from all over the place. Examples include oil and gas washing off of streets, driveways, and parking lots; fertilizer and other chemicals running off our lawns and landscapes; and de-icing materials (road salt) washing off of pavement.

Now for the good news. Anything we do to be environmental stewards is already contributing to cleaner water: using organic methods in our landscape, choosing fuel-efficient vehicles, performing regular vehicle maintenance, and minimizing driving and idling for example.

At Friends of the Rouge, much of our river restoration work involves planting native plants and building rain gardens. Native plants, compared to traditional lawn grass, have deeper, more extensive roots to absorb rainwater. Any way we can get rainwater to soak into soil wherever it lands, without sending it to the storm drain, reduces the volume of polluted water going to CSOs. This reduces local flooding, reduces sediment entering the river, and helps prevent a high volume of stormwater from causing bank erosion.

The bad news is humans create pollution no matter how hard we try not to. The good news is we humans also have the power to reduce the amount and severity of the pollution we generate.

A rain garden is the superstar of absorbing excess stormwater in place. The opposite of a raised bed garden, it is a depression built into the ground, collecting rainfall from downspouts or pavement runoff. Planted with Michigan natives tolerant of both wet and dry conditions, it is a beautiful habitat garden for native pollinators and songbirds that works hard for clean water! Homes, businesses, and municipalities can employ rain gardens or other forms of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI).



Huron River at Island Lake State Park

Now for the good news. Anything we do to be environmental stewards is already contributing to cleaner water: using organic methods in our landscape, choosing fuel-efficient vehicles, performing regular vehicle maintenance, and minimizing driving and idling for example.

Here are more ways you can be an Everyday Watershed Steward.

- If you see water pollution (oil on the surface, a foamy appearance, or other discoloration) don't hesitate,: report it right away through the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) Pollution Emergency Alerting System (PEAS) hotline 800-292-4706. Go ahead and put this number in your phone now.

- Minimize the amount of de-icing material you use.

- If your property is adjacent to a waterway, plant a riparian buffer of native plants. This provides the added benefit of reducing geese on your property; they prefer lawn growing all the way to the water's edge.

- Redirect downspouts away from pavement and toward landscape areas or into rain gardens.
- Minimize impervious surfaces wherever possible. Use permeable pavers or reduce or remove pavement wherever possible. Research shows that rivers become degraded if there is more than 10% impervious cover in their watershed.

- Volunteer or become a member of your local watershed, native plant, or environmental organization.

- Learn more about protecting watersheds, and share what you know with friends, family, and colleagues.

- Remember how public outcry over pollution led to our landmark environmental protections? Your voice is powerful. Attend your City Council meetings. Advocate for the use of green stormwater infrastructure, more efficient de-icing methods, native plant ordinances, and other environmental ordinances wherever you can.

- Because another producer of nonpoint source pollution is Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), eat less commercial or fast-food meat. Choose local, sustainable sources.

As we journey alongside the rivers of our life on earth, may we become more and more a blessing, a friend of the river, bringing more vibrancy and joy into our own lives in the process.

Learning how to build a rain garden is easy through the Southeast Michigan Master Rain Gardener classes. The next class starts at the end of January. You can also learn more by reading the Planning Your Rain Garden article in *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*, Issue #82. Read here... cwcommunityjournal/docs/issue_82.

Rosina Newton is a holistic landscape designer and educator. She has enjoyed planting trees and teaching humans of all ages in Texas, New York, and now Michigan. Visit her online at newearthhomeandgarden.com/

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Sustainable Health

Hypnosis For Peace of Mind

By Sherris Cottier Shank

At the heart of well-being is an embodied sense of peace and equanimity.

Peace is the felt experience of an inner sanctuary—a place of tranquillity and calm detachment that you can always access. Equanimity is composure under stress. It is a deep internal knowing that no matter what happens you will handle it and be okay.

Embodied peace and equanimity empower you to *choose* your response to circumstances rather than react in the heat of the moment.

Embodied peace and equanimity empower you to *choose* your response to circumstances rather than react in the heat of the moment. Regardless of the circumstance confronting you, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, your internal navigation system guides you to a response that serves your highest good.

Peace of mind and equanimity affect every aspect of your well-being: physical, emotional, and spiritual. The fastest, most effective path to developing this desirable state that I have discovered utilizes hypnosis.

My personal experience

When I discovered hypnotherapy, I wondered where it had been all my life. Why had it taken so long for me to find it?

Like many other people, I suffered from depression for decades, and just like my clients today, I searched far and wide for solutions. I embarked on years of talk therapy and spiritual counselling. I took antidepressants. I researched endlessly. Over many years, I read and/or listened to every book, seminar, interview, and presentation I could find on psychology, spirituality, and the brain. Everything I did helped, but nothing freed me completely from the abyss.

Over many years, I read and/or listened to every book, seminar, interview, and presentation I could find on psychology, spirituality, and the brain. Everything I did helped, but nothing freed me completely from the abyss.

It took a massive medical crisis and 15 months of astonishingly slow recuperation for me to discover hypnotherapy. During that lengthy period of physical healing, there wasn't much I could do except read and sleep, and I had plenty of time to ponder the state of my life.

In one of those "the writing is on the wall" moments, I realized that I could not continue the way I had been and that my whole life needed to change. I asked myself repeatedly, "What does my soul want?" What a blessing that extended recovery became! It created space for the answer to that question to float up from my subconscious mind and allowed the more hidden aspects of my inner being to emerge. My deep spirituality rose to the surface, and with it came a longing to help others.

One day, while idly surfing the Internet, I stumbled upon an article about hypnosis in *Psychology Today*. As I read it, something inside me lit up and stood at attention, and I felt compelled to learn more. I had observed in the hospital that the medical community had two things to offer me: drugs and surgery. Hypnosis appeared to be an alternative healing modality that could have helped me relax and accept what was happening to me so I could adapt to my current physical needs.

The more I explored, the more I wanted to know, and my thirst for knowledge about hypnotherapy grew at every step. I read every article and book on the subject that I could find and researched places where I might study hypnosis further. As soon as I was well enough, I enrolled in a training program at the Clinical Hypnosis Institute and discovered the tool I'd been looking for my whole life.

I was in heaven.

Now, having experienced the power of hypnosis in my own life and with hundreds of clients, I am endlessly grateful for its ability to heal deeply buried emotional wounds that stand in the way of experiencing peace and equanimity.

Why is hypnosis so fast and effective?

As we go about our daily lives, we are primarily aware of our conscious mind which is exquisitely attuned to solving problems and planning for the future. We are unaware that the conscious mind is only 10% of our mind. Running beneath the surface is the other 90% of our mind, the subconscious mind: a powerhouse of immense abilities that can help us make the changes that allow peace of mind and equanimity to develop.

The great gift of hypnosis is that it allows us to tap into the power of our subconscious mind which runs our lives. Not only does the subconscious mind control our body's physical processes, it is also the storehouse for our memories, emotional wounds, desires, and dreams.

Here's the truth: if we aren't experiencing peace of mind and equanimity in our current lives, it is because blocks, wounds, and obstacles festering in our subconscious mind prevent it.

Unfortunately, the conscious mind cannot solve problems in the subconscious mind. So, we need a tool to access the subconscious. That tool is hypnosis.

Consider, for example, a client of mine whose father was so dismissive and abusive that he continually heard his father's toxic words in his mind. He has become so accustomed to them that he forgot those are not thoughts that he originated.

The primary imperative of the subconscious mind is to keep us alive; its secondary imperative is to protect us. It seeks to assist us but is hindered by outdated information and unresolved emotional wounds that have yet to heal.

My client's conscious mind had no control over this toxic voice because it resided in his subconscious. However, when guided through hypnosis, he re-educated his subconscious to recognize that his father was long gone and that the harmful words he internalized in an effort to protect himself were now causing distress. Once the subconscious understood and accepted this, it shifted and conveyed different messages that are beneficial to my client's current circumstances.

The primary imperative of the subconscious mind is to keep us alive; its secondary imperative is to protect us. It seeks to assist us but is hindered by outdated information and unresolved emotional wounds that have yet to heal. Just as we need to update our computers, we must refresh the programs operating in our subconscious minds by healing emotional wounds and forming new beliefs that align with our desired lives. Accessing our subconscious minds through hypnosis makes this task significantly easier and faster.

Hypnosis is a collaborative experience

When I work with clients, I serve as their guide while they embark on their journey to heal. They permit me to lead them into a deeply relaxed hypnotic state, allowing us to resolve the identified issue collaboratively. It's vital to grasp this distinction as many people mistakenly think of hypnosis as something done to them when, in reality, it is a process we engage in together.

It's also helpful to understand that no one will do anything that violates one of their core values. This is why, even though I hypnotize easily, I would be a poor candidate for stage hypnosis. Doing silly things to entertain others would violate my sense of privacy and sovereignty, and I wouldn't do them no matter who the hypnotist was.

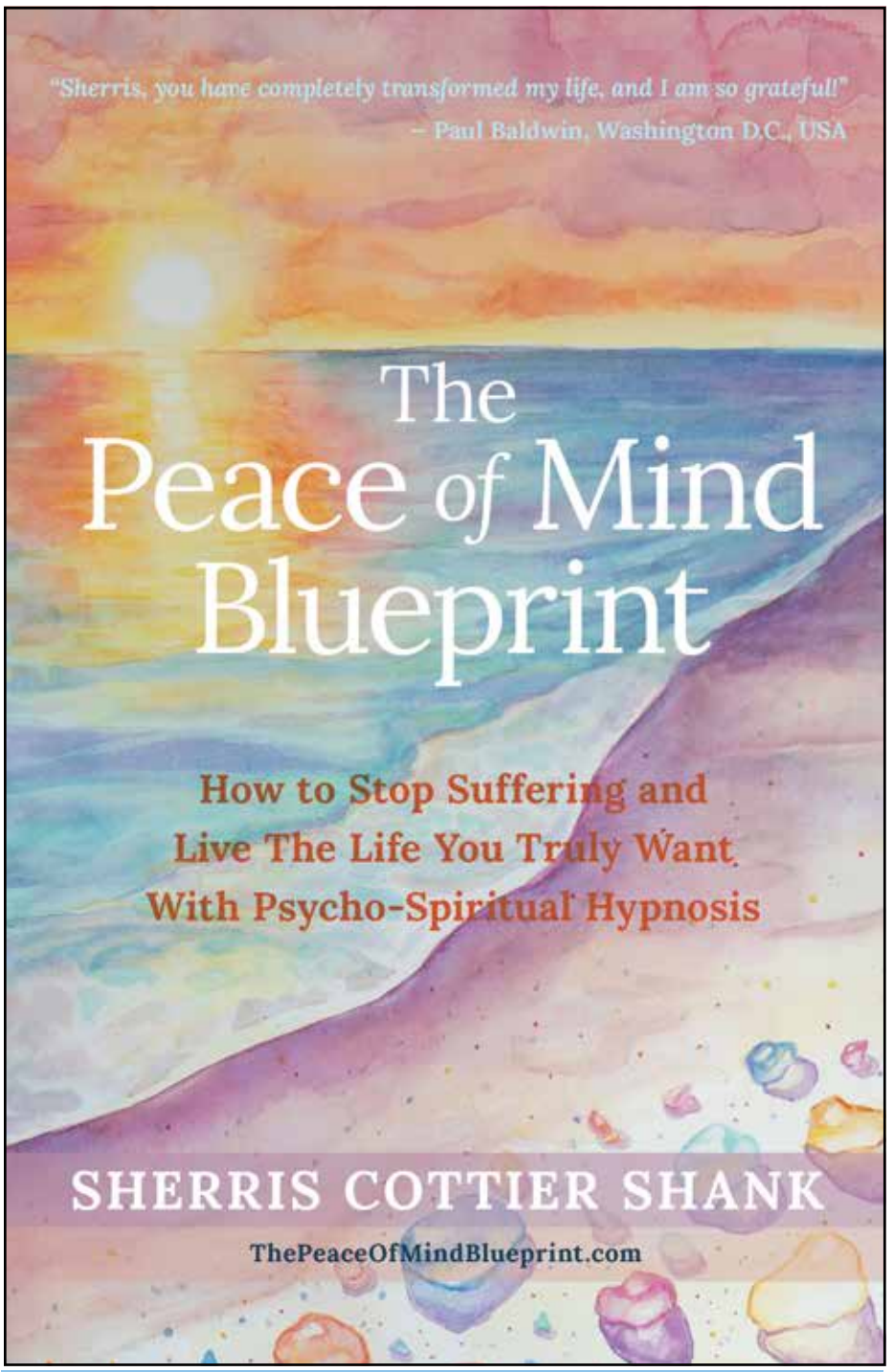
Unlike stage hypnosis, which is designed to entertain, therapeutic hypnosis is designed to heal, and that requires a resonance between the client and hypnotherapist. If a client doesn't feel safe, nothing will happen.

In my experience, hypnosis feels like a lucid dream. I feel safe, comfortable, and somewhat detached from my body and surroundings yet tuned in on a deeper level.

What does hypnosis feel like?

In my experience, hypnosis feels like a lucid dream. I feel safe, comfortable, and somewhat detached from my body and surroundings yet tuned in on a deeper level. I can hear everything being said, respond to questions, and quickly retrieve information while feeling extraordinarily relaxed. It's an enjoyable experience where I can visualize easily and quickly understand information.

The secret to a good hypnosis experience is a deep desire to change your life. The more you want it, the easier it will be. If you bring an open mind and a receptive heart, you can embrace change at a level your conscious mind can't achieve.


"Sherris, you have completely transformed my life, and I am so grateful"
– Paul Baldwin, Washington D.C., USA
The Peace of Mind Blueprint
How to Stop Suffering and Live The Life You Truly Want With Psycho-Spiritual Hypnosis
SHERRIS COTTIER SHANK
ThePeaceOfMindBlueprint.com

A Book Excerpt From *The Peace of Mind Blueprint*

A Quick Hello

There is nothing more exhilarating than watching someone release trauma, overcome fear, and stand their ground as the magnificent being they are. Every time I witness this in a client, it is more magical and rewarding than the last, and my passion for hypnotherapy and personal transformation grows a little more.

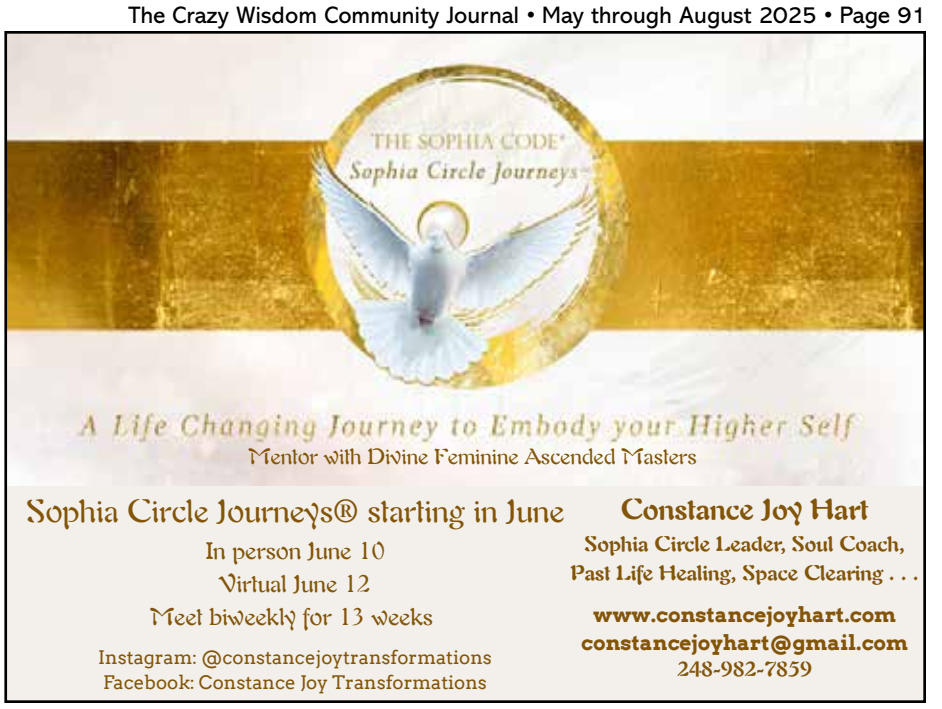
Clients often experience a series of turnarounds as they start deactivating painful experiences festering in their subconscious. I have seen what's possible when a person is truly ready to change. When a person is tired of being consumed by an endless cycle of negative thoughts and turbulent emotions and ready to embrace hypnotherapy, they can resolve and release those old wounds and step into the wholeness of who they are.

One such client, whom I will call Emily, was grieving the death of a daughter she had aborted under duress. She was very young at the time and wanted to keep the child, but her husband vehemently objected. Without support from other family members, she faced an impossible decision with no good alternatives.

Years later, while working with me, she shared her belief that she deserved punishment for getting that abortion, and she could not forgive herself, even though she now had healthy children at home. The guilt she felt gnawed relentlessly at both her self-respect and her sense of self-worth. She felt cursed for life and could see no way out.

As we worked together, I had the strong intuition that Emily needed to talk to that daughter, who was now in Spirit and ask for her forgiveness. This would be impossible for the conscious mind, but the subconscious mind has no sense of time or space and talking to people in Spirit is no different than talking to people who are flesh and blood.

During that hypnotic conversation, Emily apologized to her child and told her the name she had picked for her. She asked for and received forgiveness and was able to give and receive deep love. The results were miraculous. When Emily arrived for our next session, she told me that for the first time since that event occurred so many years before, she felt a deep sense of peace with what happened and a 100% reduction in guilt.


THE SOPHIA CODE
Sophia Circle Journeys
A Life Changing Journey to Embody your Higher Self
Mentor with Divine Feminine Ascended Masters
Sophia Circle Journeys® starting in June
In person June 10
Virtual June 12
Meet biweekly for 13 weeks
Instagram: @constancejoytransformations
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Sophia Circle Leader, Soul Coach,
Past Life Healing, Space Clearing . . .
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constancejoyhart@gmail.com
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YOU CAN HEAL YOUR PAIN
WHAT IS THE RAY OF HOPE YOU NEED IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?
HOW MANY PLACES HAVE YOU SEARCHED FOR IT?
• Psycho-Spiritual Hypnotherapy
• Online or In Person
• Emotional and Spiritual Healing
Sherris Cottier Shank C.Ht.
BirminghamClinicalHypnotherapy.com
248-842-7783

The transformation that looks impossible at first becomes ever more possible—and probable—as emotional roadblocks are eliminated one by one, creating the space for confidence and enthusiasm to grow.

When someone says to me, "I can't stand this. I can't live like this anymore," I throw up my hands in celebration and say, "Wonderful! You're in the perfect place for change." At that point, we become partners in a life-affirming journey of healing and growth, and I can't think of anything that fires me up more.

I often tell clients that they drive the bus, and I navigate. They tell me where they want to go, and I find the fastest, easiest route. This really sums up the collaborative hypnotherapeutic journey: there's a place you want to reach and the hypnotic processes that get you there. It's a step-by-step process, with one session building on another until one day, you realize, "Hey! I'm not filled with angst and pain anymore."

And *that* is a beautiful discovery!

Sherris Cottier Shank is a psycho-spiritual hypnotherapist who has practiced for seven years. She is also the author of The Peace of Mind Blueprint. *You can learn more about her practice in Birmingham, MI by visiting birminghamclinicalhypnotherapy.com. Contact Sherris by calling 248-842-7783 or emailing Sherris.bch@gmail.com or visit the office at 261 East Maple #203, Birmingham, MI 48009.*

Spirit Seeds

By Triana Jones

Welcome to Spirit Seeds! I'm Triana, your guide through this journey of inquiry. I am a single mother, a wounded healer, an eclectic witch, and a practicing spiritualist of sixteen years. My last few years have been spent in the pursuit of knowledge which I believe is one of the master keys of life. I received my first oracle deck from my grandfather sixteen years ago and have been reading cards professionally for the past seven years. In 2023, I was certified in Quantum Healing Hypnosis Therapy and herbalism.

In this column, readers submit their questions, and we dive deep to find the answers. We'll embark on a journey of holistic exploration, delving into ancient practices and unraveling the enigmas of existence. Whether you're a seasoned enthusiast or a curious newcomer, this column offers a platform for deepening your understanding and expanding your consciousness. Are you curious about a certain new-age subject or practice? Seeking advice or perspective on a spiritual or holistic matter? Submit your questions at AskSpiritSeed@gmail.com and have a chance to be featured in our next issue.

I'm feeling stuck in my shadow work, particularly around my past traumas. Are there specific crystals or energy-healing techniques that could help me move forward?

For deeper and more powerful healing, consider using moldavite and black tourmaline. Moldavite is known for its intense, transformative energy often called the "stone of transformation." It can help accelerate spiritual awakening and deep healing by bringing to light deeply buried traumas. Black tourmaline is a robust, grounding and protective stone that can shield you from negative energies and transmute them into positive ones. In addition to these crystals, energy healing techniques like Reiki and Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) can be highly effective. Reiki helps balance your chakras by penetrating and clearing blockages with pure universal energy promoting overall well-being. It is a brilliant healing white light that casts away the sludge that has collected over time in your chakras. For more information, check out the article "10 Benefits to Learning Reiki: A Life-Changing Healing Practice" on the Gaia Network. You can find a Reiki practitioner, or learn to perform Reiki on yourself, to enhance your healing process. EFT involves tapping on specific meridian points on the body while verbalizing affirmations," or addressing the issues at hand, which helps release the emotional charge associated with past traumas. To maximize the benefits, create a sacred space for your healing practices. Set up a quiet area with your crystals, soothing music, and perhaps some incense or essential oils like frankincense or sandalwood. Meditate with the crystals, visualizing their energy enveloping and healing you. Journaling your feelings and experiences can also provide additional clarity and emotional release. Remember, deep healing takes time, so be patient and compassionate with yourself throughout this journey.

I've recently started working with the Akashic Records. How can I improve my ability to access and interpret the information I receive?

Accessing the Akashic Records can be profoundly transformative and insightful as they are believed to contain the energetic imprints of all thoughts, emotions, events, and experiences throughout time. As such, they may offer individuals deep self-discovery, healing, and guidance by providing clarity on life purpose, karmic patterns, and spiritual evolution while also facilitating emotional release, the healing of past traumas, the dissolution of limiting beliefs, and empowering personal growth through a heightened understanding of one's soul journey and interconnectedness with the universe. To improve your ability to access and interpret the information you receive, create a quiet, sacred space where you won't be disturbed. This helps you enter a meditative state more easily. Begin with a grounding practice, like deep breathing or visualization, to center yourself. Before accessing the records, set a clear intention. Be specific about what you want to know or understand. This focused intent guides your session and helps you receive relevant information. Use a prayer or invocation to open the records. A popular one can be found in the book, *The Pathway Prayer Process, to Access the Heart of the Akashic Records* by Linda Howe. You can find this prayer online as well at lindahowe.com/ppp. As you read or recite the meditation, visualize a door opening to the Akashic Records. When you receive information, trust your intuition. The messages can come in various forms—images, feelings, words, or even a deep knowing. Write down everything you perceive even if it doesn't make immediate sense. Sometimes clarity comes later. Interpreting the information requires patience and practice. Reflect on the messages and how they relate to your current life situation. Journaling can be incredibly helpful for this. Revisit your notes regularly to see how your understanding evolves over time, and never stop researching. Finally, practice self-compassion. Working with the Akashic Records is a skill that develops over time. Be gentle with yourself, and don't get discouraged if it takes a while to feel proficient or understand the messages you've been given. Trust that you're on the right path, and with each session, your connection will grow stronger.

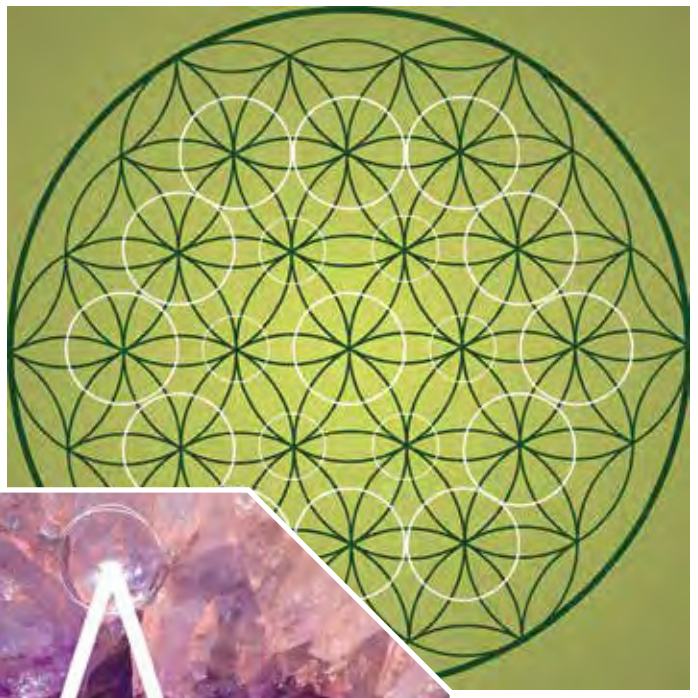
What are the most advanced methods for connecting to and co-creating with the elemental spirits, faerie realm, and Earth's crystal core to support planetary ascension and receive their teachings on nature's divine blueprint?

Connecting with the elemental spirits, faerie realm, and Earth's crystal core at an advanced level requires deep energetic alignment and intention. Achieving energetic alignment involves harmonizing the body's energy centers or chakras, by doing things like cultivating mindfulness, engaging in healing practices like Reiki, and embracing emotional release which allows for the integration of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being while promoting inner balance and clarity. One method I find powerful is sacred geometry grids.

Create a crystal grid in the shape of a pentagram or other sacred geometry and use stones like labradorite or moss agate to enhance your connection to the elementals. While meditating with this grid, visualize yourself in the center sending energy down into the Earth's crystal core. Imagine drawing that energy back up through the grid connecting to the faerie realm and the elemental spirits.

Another advanced practice is faerie invocation through sound frequencies. Use a drum or chime tuned to 432 Hz (Earth's frequency) and call in the faerie realm by drumming or chanting in a rhythmic pattern. This opens a portal for faerie energies to enter and co-create with you. Co-creating with faeries can offer profound spiritual insights as they are believed to be guardians of nature and subtle energy assisting in harmonizing with the Earth's ecosystems, facilitating energy healing, and inspiring creativity and manifestation through their high-vibrational essence; this collaboration can also deepen intuitive abilities, restore the balance between physical and spiritual realms, provide teachings on nature's divine blueprint, and serve as protectors of sacred spaces, ultimately supporting personal growth and planetary ascension. Pay attention to shifts in your environment—warmth, flashes of light, or soft whispers.

Light codes are vibrational patterns, geometric symbols, and frequencies believed to carry divine information and energetic imprints from higher realms offering spiritual activation, DNA awakening, and energetic healing while expanding consciousness and enhancing intuitive abilities; by working with these codes, individuals can clear energetic blockages, access higher states of awareness, align with their soul's purpose, and manifest intentions more effectively ultimately supporting personal evolution and cosmic connection. To connect with the Earth's crystal core more deeply, use light codes and breathwork. In a meditative state, visualize light codes flowing through your breath spiraling down into the Earth. Breathe them into the core, and then inhale the Earth's wisdom back into your heart, anchoring it in your energy field. This supports planetary ascension and aligns you with nature's divine blueprint. Check out the book *Enchantment of the Faerie Realm: Communicate with Nature Spirits and Elementals* by Ted Andrews to learn more about connecting with the faerie realm.



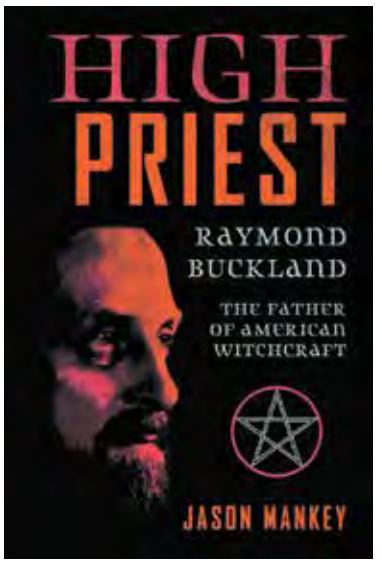
What are the latest advancements in plant bioacoustics research, and how can I apply them practically?

Recently, researchers have made incredible strides in understanding how plants use sound to communicate and respond to their environment. To practically apply this, you could set up a simple bioacoustic system with sensors that pick up these sounds. By analyzing these frequencies, you can get real-time insights into your plants' needs. For instance, if you notice a plant is emitting distress signals, you can adjust watering or light conditions accordingly. Another method is to create a soundscape that promotes plant growth. Some studies suggest that certain types of music or sound frequencies can enhance plant development. You might experiment with playing calming frequencies or nature sounds around your plants and observe any changes in their growth and health.

Lastly, integrating these techniques into your spiritual practices can deepen your connection with nature. Recent advancements in plant bioacoustics confirm that plants emit ultrasonic frequencies when stressed or thriving, making it possible to monitor plant health using contact microphones, ultrasonic sensors, and specialized software for frequency analysis. Sound therapy with frequencies like 528 Hz, or classical music, has been shown to enhance growth by stimulating cellular activity and nutrient absorption. This approach also extends to spiritual practices where plant-generated frequencies can be integrated into meditation or energy healing, aligning with sound healing principles to promote mindfulness. Additional creative uses could be transforming plant sound data into art installations or educational tools to further highlight the practical applications of this research, demonstrating how sound-based techniques can foster both physical plant health and for humans, deeper connections with nature. Use the data and sounds from your plants as a meditative tool, tuning into their energy and needs as part of your daily spiritual routine. This not only supports plant health but also fosters a harmonious bond with your green companions. To explore the fascinating science behind how plants produce and perceive sound, be sure to check out *Towards Understanding Plant Bioacoustics* by Monica Gagliano, Stefano Mancuso, and Daniel Robert.

Upcoming Event with Jason Mankey, Author of *High Priest: Raymond Buckland, Father of American Witchcraft*

Friday, June 27th, 4 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.



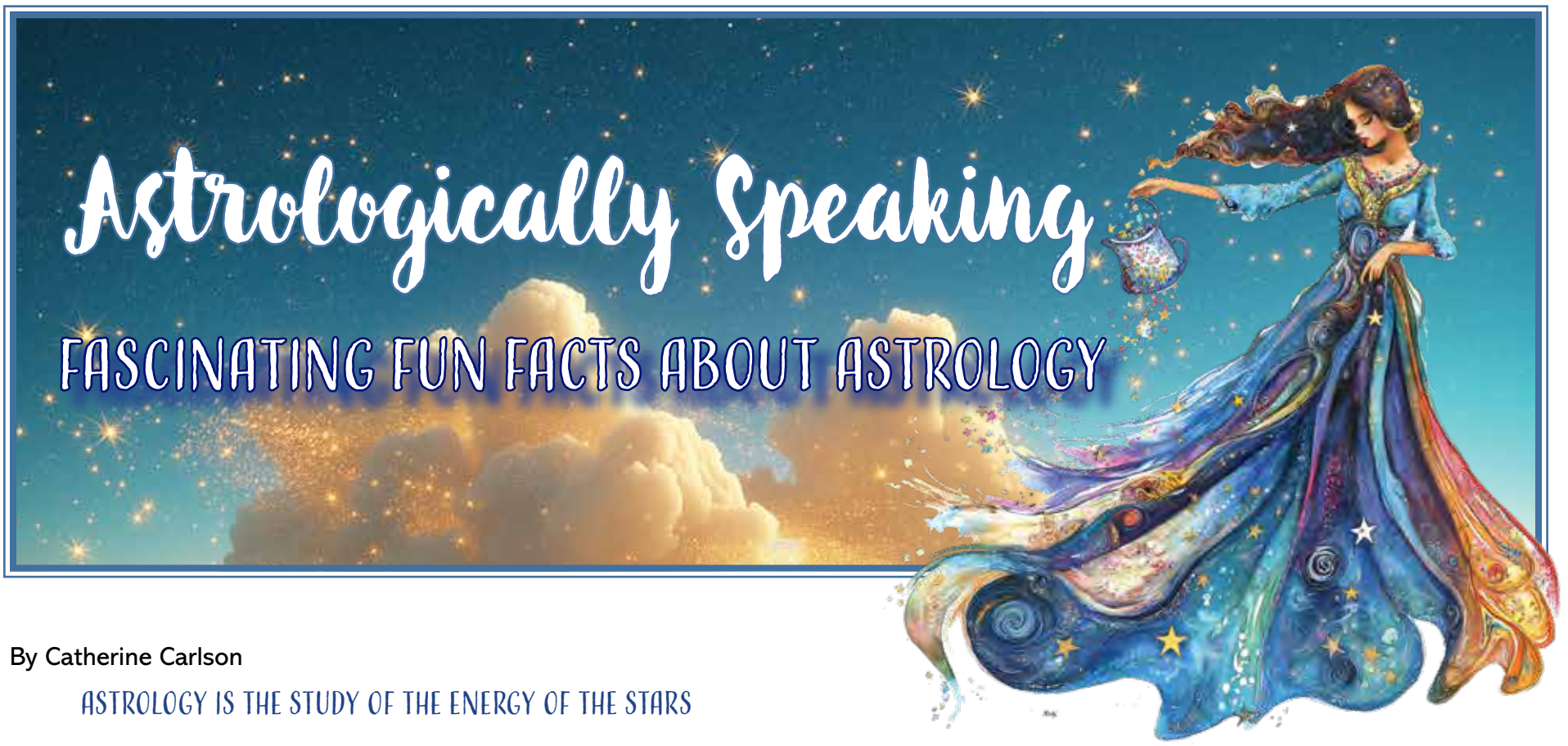
Free to attend

for more information, email Chandra at chandra@crazywisdom.net

Look behind the scenes at the life of the father of American Witchcraft.

Casting new light on one of the first modern self-identifying Witches in the US, Jason Mankey invites you deep into Raymond Buckland's life. Known for bringing Wicca to America, Buckland wrote more than forty titles, placing him among the most prolific occult authors of all time.

Jason Mankey is a third-degree High Priest and prolific Witchcraft author. A bit of a nomad in his younger years, Jason has lived in both the Midwest (a former Michigander) and the American South, and currently resides in California's Silicon Valley, where he helps run two local covens with his wife, Ari. Jason has spent the last twenty-five years of his life researching the Horned God, Witchcraft, and magickal history, and the occult influences in rock and roll music.



Astrologically Speaking

Fascinating Fun Facts About Astrology

By Catherine Carlson

Astrology is the Study of the Energy of the Stars

Astrology is an ancient art of divination which interprets the symbolic meaning of the constellations and planets, their cycles and aspects, and the way they interact with people, places, and events. It is the study of the interplay between the orbit of the stars over time and how they reflect our lives. Any person, location, or event, such as a marriage, or start of a business, can be viewed astrologically.

Your Astrological Birth Chart is a Map of You

At the exact moment you were born, a picture was taken of the heavens and that is your personal birth or natal chart. This chart shows where all the planets were at the moment of birth and how they interact with each other. Astrologers view the natal chart as a map of a person's life. It contains information about their personality, gifts, challenges, and can reflect events in one's life. You can view your astrology chart for free on astro.com and several other sites.

What is the Rising Sign?

Approximately every two hours, the zodiac sign that is rising on the eastern horizon changes. Knowing the exact time of birth indicates what the rising sign or ascendant is and marks the beginning of a natal chart. It indicates what houses the planets belong in. Houses are symbolic areas in a chart representing different aspects of ourselves. The ascendant sign is considered to be one of the strongest influences and may represent first impressions others have of you.

Astrology had an effect on you even before you were born. The lunar eclipse and the solar eclipses that occured while you were growing inside your mother can indicate some interesting aspects of your life.

Astrology Represents Four Elements

Each of the twelve zodiac signs represent one of four different elements: fire, earth, air, and water. Knowing what element your sun, or other planets are, is another way to understand yourself and others. Fire signs Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius are bright, energetic and fiery. Earth signs Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn tend to be task oriented, responsible and tenacious. Air signs Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius are of the mental realm. They can be talkative, deep thinkers or day dreamers. Lastly, the water signs Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces can be warm and nurturing or highly sensitive. (I'll be expanding on this in the fall issue!)

You Were Affected by the Planets Even Before You Arrived

Astrology had an effect on you even before you were born. The lunar eclipse and the solar eclipses that occured while you were growing inside your mother can indicate some interesting aspects of your life. In her book *Spiritual Astrology*, the late Jan Spiller explains the meaning of these. The energy of the solar eclipse is something that you came to teach and the lunar eclipse shows what you came to learn. They will always be in different signs. For example, if the solar eclipse was in Gemini, you came to teach "the value of communication." Someone else with the lunar eclipse in Gemini has come to learn about communication and language.

Your Mercury Sign

Because the planet Mercury is so close to the sun, it will always be in the same sign that your sun is in, or the sign on either side of your sun sign. For example, if your sun sign is Taurus, Mercury might fall in Taurus as well, but it could be Aries, which is the sign that comes before it, or Gemini, the sign that comes after. Mercury represents how we think and communicate, a large part of who we are. If you have always felt like your sun sign might not fit completely with your personality—it could be because Mercury is in a different sign and it's actually your communication style and thought process which is in contrast to your sun sign.

Children of the Moon

If you were born at night, when the sun was below the horizon, you have a nocturnal chart which aligns with the moon. The moon has a changeable nature since it waxes and wanes and is often hidden. Children of the moon typically have a life or career path that changes or fluctuates, like the moon.

Children of the Sun

If you were born during the daytime, when the sun was above the horizon, you have a diurnal chart which aligns with the sun. The sun is steady and reliable, it appears the same each day. People born during the day will likely have a life or career path that is more consistent, just like the sun.

Your Birthday has an Astrological Effect on You Each Year

Each year on your birthday the sun returns to the exact same place it was when you were born. This is called your Solar Return. This time is like a battery charge and you may notice a surge of vitality in the weeks that follow. The position of planets is unique each year and can indicate what themes might be highlighted in the coming year until your next birthday. This could be anything from career, finances, learning, teaching, or friendships to name a few.

Astrology Can Show Relationship Compatibility

One of the most popular uses of astrology is for relationships! The technical name for this is synastry, where you compare the charts of any two people. Synastry can show what areas of a person's life are influenced by another and in what way. It can show who might enhance your creativity or be a good life partner, as well as who would be a great travel companion or a career advocate.

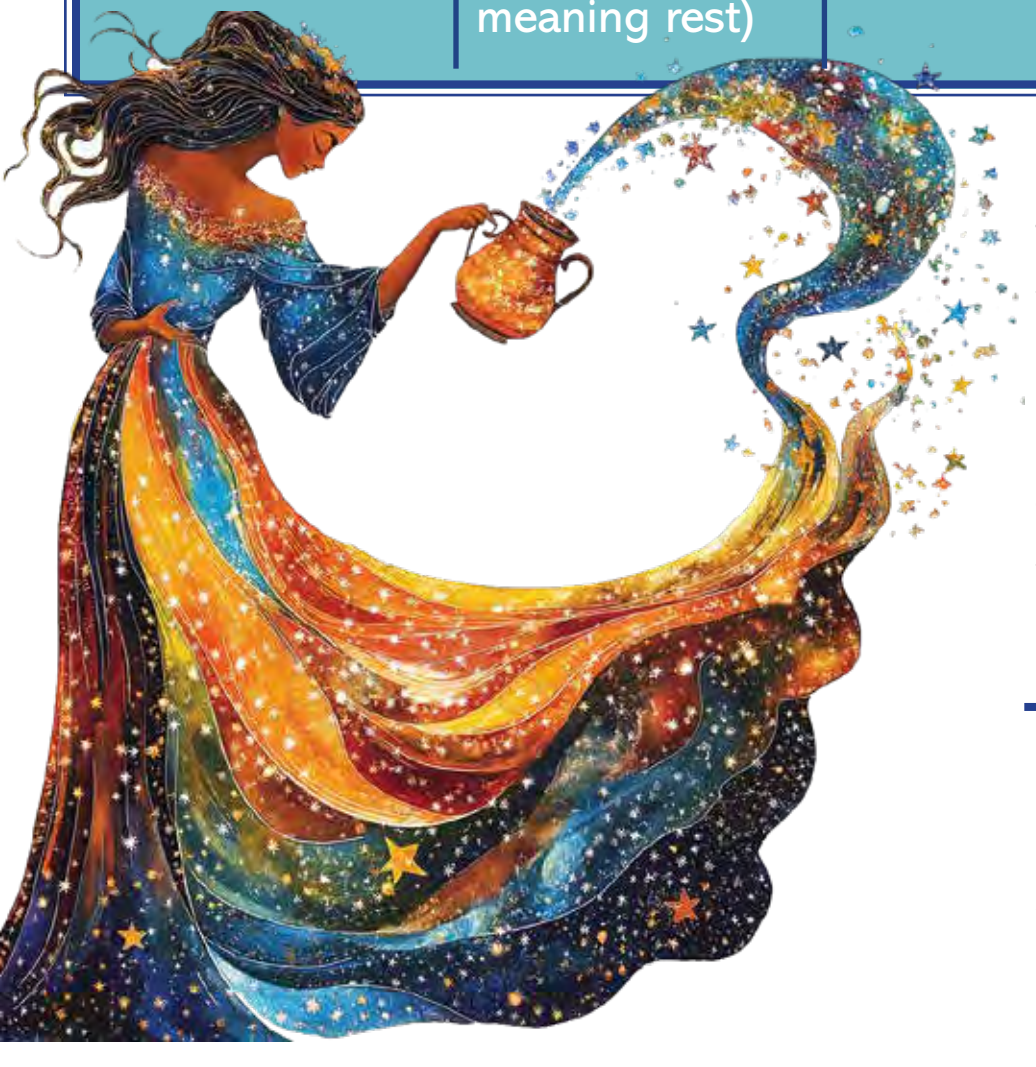
Can Astrology Predict the Future?

Astrology is like a cosmic weather forecasting tool. Meteorology can tell us when a storm is coming, but not how much accumulation will take place or what location will be most strongly affected. Similarly, astrology can tell us with great accuracy when a certain energy is going to surface—such as a Mercury retrograde period, or when certain planetary transits indicate potential opportunities or difficulties, but we do not know exactly how things will play out. Many astrologers read the challenging energy of 2020, but none that I know predicted a global pandemic.

THE SEVEN DAYS OF THE WEEK ARE NAMED AFTER THE PLANETS

Dating all the way back to ancient Sumeria, the etymology of the days of the week are from the first seven known planets in our solar system. It is a bit easier to see the correlation for some of the days if we look at the days of the week in a language with terms more closely related to Latin, such as Spanish.

Planet Correlation	Spanish	Latin
Sun	Domingo (from Latin Dominus meaning Lord)	dies Solis, “day of the Sun”
Moon	Lunes (Moon)	dies Lunae, “day of the Moon”
Mars	Martes	dies Martis, “day of Mars” (Roman god of war)
Mercury	Miércoles	dies Mercurii, “day of Mercury” (Roman messenger of the gods and god of commerce, travel, thievery, eloquence, and science)
Jupiter	Jueves	dies Iovis, “day of Jupiter” (Roman god who created thunder and lightning, patron of the Roman state)
Venus	Viernes	dies Veneris, “day of Venus” (Roman goddess of love and beauty)
Saturn	Sabado (From “sabat” a Hebrew word meaning rest)	dies Saturni, “day of Saturn” (Roman god of agriculture)



IS THERE A THIRTEENTH SIGN OF THE ZODIAC?

The short answer is yes, although it is not officially acknowledged. There is a large constellation called Ophiuchus (derived from the Greek “serpent-bearer”) which sits between Scorpio and Sagittarius. Those born under this sign may have traits associated with both signs. It is unique in that the sun takes only eighteen days to move through it, from November 29—December 17, instead of the normal thirty days. It is considered to be a fire sign, and, like Sagittarius and Pisces, it is also ruled by the planet Jupiter. The symbol of Ophiuchus—a man holding a serpent, resembles the caduceus symbol of medicine and his name is associated with transformation and healing. It is thought that those born within the dates of this sign possess great wisdom and healing capabilities. This sign was rejected from the zodiac early on, since adding it would drastically alter the current structure of astrology.

Catherine Carlson is an Astrologer who offers consultations for adults and children. She is an Ann Arbor native who enjoys living locally with her family. She can be reached at catherine-carlson.com or catenka@mac.com.

a free guide to local classes, workshops, and events

May through August 2025

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Calendar edited by Kaili Brooks

Art and Craft

Fiber Arts with Dzanc House • Thursday, May 1, 15, & 29; June 12 & 26; July 10 & 24th; August 7 & 21 • 6 to 9:00 p.m. • Do you work in fiber arts? Want to meet with other artists who also crochet, knit, embroider, etc? Come on out to hang at Dzanc House and be in community as you engage in your work. We are a safe and inclusive space. FREE. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Day Studios for Local Artists and Writers with Dzanc House • Thursday, May 1 through Sunday, June 15 • Dzanc House is offering quiet and ample spaces for local artists and writers to work on their creative projects. Overnight accommodation is not provided. Offering includes access to all shared facilities (studio, gallery, kitchen, bathrooms) and event programming. Applications are open. Early bird special rate available for local artists! $100 per week or $375 for the month. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Opening Reception for "Ladyscapes & Climate Haste" Gallery Exhibition with Brittany Slater & Mackenzie Stolzenberg • Friday, May 2 • 6 to 9:00 p.m. • Amid the anxiety of our present world, there is one hopeful thread running through all of the madness: women trying to save the world. The surreal focus of the collages envokes states of contemplation and grief, but also curiosity and creativity! Gallery is open until May 30. FREE. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Figure Drawing with Dzanc House • May 7 & 21; June 4 & 18; July 2 & 30; August 13 & 27 • 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. • Practice drawing from life at Dzanc House. All skills are welcome! We recommend you bring your preferred drawing utensils and a sketchbook/large drawing pad. Model and light refreshments included. $10. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

The Art, Science & Reciprocity of EcoCreativity with Robin Lily Goldberg • Monday, May 12 & 19; June 9 • 6 to 7:00 p.m. • This interdisciplinary series illustrates how meaningful poems, stories, and paintings can emerge through co-creating with the Earth. We'll draw inspiration from visionary writers and artists to experience the regenerative benefits of collaborating with our environments. Everyone has creative capacities within, and everyone is welcome. $45. For more information contact Robin at robin@aurily.com or visit aurily.com.

Collage & Chill with Dzanc House • Tuesday, May 13 & 27; June 10 & 24; July 8 & 22; August 5 & 19 • 6 to 8:00 p.m. • No theme. No agenda. Just collaging. Supplies are provided, but feel free to bring your own as well! Suggested donation of $5. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Nature Journaling with Mary Ledvina • Thursday, May 8, 15, 22, & 29; June 5 & 12 • 2 to 4:00 p.m. • Experience being in nature while we write, draw, paint, then share. Be guided how to notice, ponder, and make connections with nature through writing along with how to "cloud log," make a map, press flowers, do diagrammatic drawings and more. $240-$300. For more information contact Mary at (734) 646-9161, email maryledvina@gmail.com, or visit maryledvina.com.

"Past the Woodland Edge:" Gallery Exhibition with Natalie Liu • Sunday, June 6 • 6 to 9:00 p.m. • "Past the Woodland Edge" is a fantastical and immersive multi-media experience featuring mobiles that tell stories—indicative of past folklore and inspired by multiple cultures; a gallery wall of creature portraits, each with different personalities; and sculptures that hint of a foreign environment that is novel, yet familiar. FREE. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Westside Art Hop with Sophie Grillet • Saturday, June 7 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. & Sunday, June 8 from Noon to 5:00 p.m. • Art Hop is a quirky Ann Arbor event in which local artists and residents of Ann Arbor's historic Old West Side open their homes or studios to the public. Visiting artists share spaces on neighbors' porches, in garages, and on lawns. Attendees love seeing truly fine art created in many different mediums with free admission and no parking headaches. FREE. For more information contact Sophie at westsidearthop@gmail.com or visit westsidearthop.com.

"Up a Tree" & "Avidity:" Gallery Exhibition with Riyin Tocco & Ken Pendergrass • Friday, July 4 • 6 to 9:00 p.m. • "Up a Tree" will focus on the nuances of nature. All photographs were taken from climbed trees to maintain a balance of youthful creativity. There will also be a call for poetry to accompany the imagery. "Avidity" will showcase small sculptures inspired by Northwest Coast art, displaying the integrity, beauty, and craftsmanship of the art form. FREE. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

"Rites of Passage of Time:" Gallery Exhibition with Ginger Chase • Friday, August 1 • 6 to 9:00 p.m. • Tree ring growth. Ice formations. Interference patters in water. "Rites of Passage of Time" documents this phenomena with a specific purpose in mind: to highlight the resilience that exists in nature (and us) through multiple visual remnants of natural responses to trauma and change. FREE. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Book Events

Silent Sustained Reading with Dzanc House • Saturday, May 10; June 14; July 12; August 9 • 1 to 2:30 p.m. • A coveted time to simply focus on reading! Bring your favorite book, snack, or drink, and we will have space to spread out and enjoy reading in the company of others who also love to read. All peoples and ages are welcome. For more information email Dzanc House at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Our Calendar Editor's Picks of Interesting Happenings in Our Community

Buddha's Birthday with Zen Temple Priests • *See Ceremonies, Celebrations, and Rituals*

Community Tarot Clinic with Nina McDermott • *See Tarot and Divination*

Pearls of Wisdom with Master Wasentha Young • *See Personal Growth*

Introduction to the Emotion & Body Code with Amanda Bate • *See Energy and Healing*

Author Talk and Book Signing for *Pagan Portals: Mestra the Shapeshifter, Ancient Heroine of the Sacred Grove* with Dianna Rhyan • *See Book Events*

The Joy of Foraging with Deanne Bednar • *See Sustainable Living Skills*

Aura & Chakra Photography with Annette Schilz • *See Energy and Healing*

Plein Air Poetry with Mary Ledvina • *See Writing and Poetry*

Flower Sound Bath with Rob Meyer-Kukan • *See Music, Sound, and Voice*

Seasonal Flow Yoga: Uniting Yoga & Ayurveda Through the Seasons with Sue Whitmarsh • *See Yoga*

An Evening *with Local Author Gaia Kile • See Nutrition and Food Medicine*

A Conversation *on the Writing Life with Local Author Colby Halloran and Rachel Pastiva • See Writing and Poetry*

Art by Jennifer Carson

If you are interested in obtaining some biographical information about the teachers, lecturers, and workshop leaders whose classes, talks, and events are listed in this calendar, please look in the section that follows the calendar, which is called "Teachers, Lecturers, Workshop Leaders, and The Centers" and which starts on page 113.

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Book Events continued...

Author Talk and Book Signing for Pagan Portals: Mestra the Shapeshifter, Ancient Heroine of the Sacred Grove with Dianna Rhyan • Wednesday, May 8 • 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. • Come honor nature goddesses and ancient mysteries. Follow a shapeshifter through sacred groves and immortal seas, to forgotten worlds of peril and beauty. Mestra invites you to re-enchant the world, to discover landscapes where primeval spirits and priestesses' dance. Goddesses shelter mysteries here, nurtured by prophetic trees, watered by speaking springs. Mestra's path of metamorphosis is always open to discovery. Her creativity and circle of sisters may mirror yours. What transformative potential is she gesturing toward for you? Suggested donation to Crazy Wisdom Bookstore. For more information contact Chandra at chandra@crazywisdom.net or visit staffoflaurel.com.

Reading of *Te'ora: From Vulnerability and Wounding to Wisdom and Freedom* with Sharon Diotte • Thursday, June 26 • 6 to 8:00 p.m. • Sharon Diotte shares her powerful memoir, *Te'ora: from Vulnerability and Wounding to Wisdom and Freedom*. 'Te'ora' means "a beautiful new life." Her international journey of healing from sexual assault and domestic violence offers comfort and inspiration for women healing from trauma, and courage to create their own beautiful lives. FREE. For more information email Sharon at teoramemoir@gmail.com.

Author Discussion and Book Signing with Jason Mankey • Friday, June 27 • 4 to 6:30 p.m. • Mankey will be at Crazy Wisdom to introduce his new book *High Priest: Raymond Buckland, Father of American Witchcraft*, a biography featuring one of the first modern self-identifying Witches in the US, Jason Mankey invites you deep into Raymond Buckland's life. Known for bringing Wicca to America, Buckland wrote more than forty titles, placing him among the most prolific occult authors of all time. Free. For more information visitcrazywisdom.net/author-talks or email events @crazywisdom.net.

Buddhism

Bodhisattva Ethics with Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe & Gala Rinpoche • Friday, May 2 through Sunday, May 4 • Times TBA • Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe teaches on the essence of morality based on Asanga's Bodhisattvabhūmi, The Bodhisattva Path to Unsurpassed Enlightenment. Gala Rinpoche teaches on Saturday evening on the power of devotion. $180 Jewel Heart member / $220 Jewel Heart non-member. Pay what you can—No one is turned away. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Jewel Heart Sunday Talks: Ancient Wisdom, Modern Times, with Demo Rinpoche • Sunday, May 4, 11, 18, & 25; June 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29; July 6, 13, & 20; August 3, 10, 17, 24, & 31 • 11:00 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. • Join Demo Rinpoche for weekly Sunday morning public talks on a variety of topics that are suitable for newcomers and long-timers alike, followed by a facilitated group discussion based on the morning talk. FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Never-Ending Lamp of Liberation: A Lam Rim Master Class with Demo Rinpoche • Tuesday, May 6, 13, 20, & 27; June 3, 10, 17, & 24; July 1, 8 & August 15 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • In the Tibetan language, "Lam Rim" means the Stages of the Path and concisely presents the Tibetan Buddhist path in logical steps that can be learned by the practitioner. With Rinpoche's special guidance, the Lam Rim can help us develop a stable mind committed to enlightenment. No charge for Jewel Heart members; $100 for non-members. Give what you can, no one is turned away. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Karuna Buddhist Center
We offer both traditional Buddhist teachings and secular approaches to mindfulness practices. Resident teacher Khenpo Tshering Chophel provides ongoing meditation instruction every Saturday morning. Join anytime!
UPCOMING RETREAT AT TRIPLE CRANE:
THE HEART'S JOURNEY: MEDITATIVE TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING COMPASSION FOR SELF AND OTHERS
JULY 18-20, 2025
Offering retreats, dharma talks, secular support discussions, spiritual mentorship, and a variety of other services.
423 S. 4th Avenue, Ann Arbor
Upper Room on 2nd floor
karunabuddhistcenter.org

Practical Buddhism with Gelek Rimpoche • Wednesday, May 7, 14, 21, & 28; June 4, 11, 18, & 25; July 2, 9, 16, & 30. • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • "Practical Buddhism" offers video recordings of earlier teachings by Gelek Rimpoche as an opportunity for some to revisit and as an introduction for others. A panel discussion with Jewel Heart Instructors follows each session. Discussions are not recorded and are available online only. Sessions review Gelek Rimpoche's 2012 Sunday talks and into early 2013. FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Love, Attachment, & Freeing the Relational Self with Joseph Loizzo • Saturday, May 10 • 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • In this workshop, Dr. Loizzo will draw on his experience integrating Buddhist psychology with contemporary psychotherapy to help participants understand the wisdom of selflessness as a practical way to heal the heartbreak of early trauma and live from our relational Buddha-self of radical openness to loving connection. $75 Jewel Heart members/$90 non-members. Pay What You Can—No one turned away. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Spring Seminar: Roots of Virtue: How to Respect and Love Yourself with Demo Rinpoche • Saturday, May 24 through Monday, May 26 • Times TBA • Ill-will and harmful actions toward others come at the expense of our own happiness and well-being. True self-interest comes in realizing that respecting and caring for others is the same as respecting and caring for ourselves. That is the meaning and value of virtue. $180 Jewel Heart member / $220 Jewel Heart non-member. Pay what you can—No one is turned away. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

The Bodhisattva's Way of Life: Enthusiasm! With Demo Rinpoche • June 12, 19, & 26; July 3, 10, & 17 • 7 to 8:00 p.m. • Shantideva's Bodhisattva's Way of Life is among the most beloved and inspiring works in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. In it, Shantideva gives detailed instructions on the benefits and methods of living in accordance with the bodhisattva ideals of unselfishly helping others. This series focuses on chapter 7, enthusiasm. Cost to be determined. Pay what you can—No one is turned away For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Breathwork

Guided Group Breathwork with Jackie Miller • May 4 & 18; June 1& 15; July 6; August 3 & 17 • 6 to 7:30 p.m. • A group session of gentle, energizing, connected breathing with music, guided by Jackie Miller, certified breathwork facilitator. Experience the power of activated breath energy and learn a variety of supportive breathing techniques. FREE, donations welcome. Registration required. For more information visit thisbreath.com.

Ceremonies, Celebrations, and Rituals

Women's Goddess Circle with Chandra • Ongoing 3rd Wednesdays • 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. • A monthly meet up for Maven, Late Millennial, Gen X, and older women. Everyone is welcome but topics will center around these ages & stages. Topics center around: book suggestions, goddess study, cycles of life, seasonal crafting, intention setting activities, anti-fascist banter, connection, and more. FREE. For more information contact events@crazywisdom.net.

Buddha's Birthday with Zen Temple Priests • Sunday, May 4 • 10:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. • 10 am. Traditional Buddha's Birthday Service with Special Chanting and Bathing of the Baby Buddha. 11:30 am. Children's Parade, Potluck, Cake, and Ice Cream. 7:30 pm. Lotus-Lantern Lighting and Chanting Service. The lighting of beautiful flower lanterns, a unique Korean tradition, ends the Buddha's Birthday observance in a serene and lovely way. FREE, donations accepted. For more information contact the Zen Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Liberation of Life with Zen Temple Priests and Dharma Teachers • Sunday, June 8 • 10 to 11:00 a.m. • In keeping with the Buddhist Precept "Do not harm, but cherish all life," the Liberation of Life Ceremony celebrates non-human species by releasing beings held in captivity and/or destined for slaughter. FREE, donations accepted. For more information contact the Zen Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Summer Solstice with Esther Kennedy • Friday, June 20 • 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. • Ritual Celebration. Strengthening our Commitment to Earth, this precious planet home. Come bring a friend and welcome summer. FREE. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000, or visit webercenter.org.

Childbirth

Understanding Birth & Baby with Ypsi-Arbor Childbirth Education • Saturday, April 5, 12, 19, & 26 • 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. • This four-week class series explores labor, birth, and a healthy postpartum. Classes are designed to provide you with a variety of tools to approach labor and postpartum feeling confident and grounded. You will leave class with a strong framework for coping with stress and pain, and anticipatory guidance for the road ahead. $390. For more information contact Ypsi- Arbor Childbirth Ed at info@YpsiArborCBE.com or visit ypsiarborcbe.com.

Children and Young Adults

May & June Littles Clubs with Leslie Science & Nature Center • Ongoing Wednesdays or Fridays • Explore the outdoors with the Little Naturalists Club for the months of May and June! Join our Littles Clubs (two and three-year-olds) community while we explore themes of Beautiful Bugs, Camp-Out, and Blowing Bubbles. All six weeks occur at the Leslie Science and Nature Center rain or shine. The program costs $250 and includes admission to the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum each program day as well as snacks at every session. Enroll your child today and watch them become budding scientists and explorers of the natural world. For more information visit discoverscienceandnature.org.

Critter House Open Hours with the Leslie Science & Nature Center • Ongoing Weekends • Noon to 3:00 p.m. •Observe frogs, turtles, snakes, and more as they hop, crawl, and slither in their habitats! Our Critter House is the home to many species native to the region. It's a great way to get up close and personal with some adorable and unusual animals, all while developing an appreciation for the incredible diversity of the natural world. FREE, $5 suggested donation. For more information visit discoverscienceandnature.org.

Roots and Wings: Final Reading & Reception Party with Dzanc House • Sunday, May 4 • 1 to 2:30 p.m. • Come and celebrate the publication of our young writers at Dzanc House! Our participants will read and showcase their work in front of family, friends, and peers. This event marks the culmination of our Roots and Wings: Elementary Arts and Culture Program with Literary Publishing program. FREE. For more information contact Dzanc House at youthprograms@dzancbooks.org.

EmpowerED: Final Reading & Reception Party with Dzanc House • Sunday, May 4 • 1 to 2:30 p.m. • Come and celebrate the publication of our young writers at Dzanc House! Our participants will read and showcase their work in front of family, friends, and peers. This event marks the culmination of our EmpowerED: The Middle and High School Literary Arts and Critical Culture Program. FREE. For more information contact Dzanc House at youthprograms@dzancbooks.org.

Fireside Fun with the Leslie Science & Nature Center • Friday, June 20; July 18; August 29 • 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. • There's nothing quite as relaxing as sitting around a campfire and swapping stories! We'll provide a blazing outdoor campfire and roasting utensils—you provide the rest! Bring your family, friends, camp chairs, outdoor games, and anything else you need to create the perfect Michigan memory. Outdoor fires are held rain or shine (except for thunder and lightning), so come dressed for the weather. No registration required. FREE.

New Moon Night Hike with the Leslie Science & Nature Center • Friday, June 27; July 25; August 22 • 8 to 9:30 p.m. • Enjoy a night hike under the stars to celebrate the alignment of the moon and the sun. We will do some science experiments out on the trail to understand how different animals' eyes see in the dark, learn about night hike etiquette, and visit nocturnal animals to learn about how they survive. After the hike, we'll hear stories and poems inspired by the moon and enjoy a campfire. Pre-registration required. $5 per person, 2 and under free. For more information visit discovercienceandnature.org.

Critters Up Close with the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum • Saturday, June 28; July 26; August 30 • Noon to 3:00 p.m. • Critters Up Close is back! This monthly series features live animals visiting from our Leslie Science & Nature Center site. On the last Saturday of each month, stop by the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum from 12-3 p.m. to meet different animals up-close and enjoy a hands-on activity. Themes and animals change every month! FREE with paid museum admission. For more information visit discoverscienceandnature.org.

Buddhist Peace Camp with Zen Temple Priests and Dharma Teachers • Friday, July 25 through Friday, August 1 • Tent camping for families and children of all ages, by the lake and in the forest, close to Ann Arbor. Peace camp programs focus on learning about peace and happiness from the Buddhist perspective. Activities emphasize fun, mindfulness, cooperation and appreciation for animals and plants while seeking to balance structure and spontaneity. Per camper fee. Please inquire. For more information contact the Zen Temple at (734) 761-6520or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Death and Dying

Ann Arbor Virtual Death Café with Rachel Briggs • Saturday, May 3; June 7; July 5; August 2 • 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. • Conversation on Zoom about all things related to death and dying. Participants join in small and large group discussion with deep listening and sharing from the heart. No agenda, no presentation. Coffee, tea, and snacks available. Open to all adults. Accessible, confidential. Please note, this is not a grief support group. FREE. For more information visit DeathCafe.com.

DR. KATHERINE MUNTER is a licensed Clinical Psychologist in Ann Arbor and a regular writer for ***The Crazy Wisdom Monthly***.

For as long as she can recall, Munter has used art and writing to help her process thoughts and experiences. Her Ann Arbor practice, Creative Life Therapy, grew out of a desire to share these powerful healing tools with others. As an art therapist and clinical psychologist, Munter believes creativity and personal growth are lifelong journeys. She works alongside her compassionate team to support others on their paths to wellbeing and self-actualization. You can find more information about Munter, her partners, and their practice at CreativeLifeTherapy.com.

Read Munter's latest essay in ***The Crazy Wisdom Monthly*** at crazywisdomjournal.com/cw-monthly-april-146

THE FRANKLIN METHOD®
Pelvic Power

By Suzanne Willets Brooks

Take a moment and close your eyes: imagine what your pelvic floor looks like. Visualize the muscles that make up the walls of the pelvic floor. Can you see what lies above and below it? What is the job description of the pelvic floor, and what does a healthy pelvic floor do? Most of us will have a problem with the above questions. We have only been told about how our pelvic floors are often dysfunctional leading to shame and mental and emotional trauma. How do you improve something you've never conceptualized? How do you create change when you do not even know what the functions of a healthy pelvic floor are supposed to be?

How do you improve something you've never conceptualized? How do you create change when you do not even know what the functions of a healthy pelvic floor are supposed to be?

To build your pelvic power, it is vital to de-stigmatize the pelvis and its functions. No one feels uncomfortable talking about their arm, leg, or stomach muscles. There are dozens of classes and machines at the gym for building flexibility and strength in these areas—yet none for your pelvic floor. We could live without our arm muscles, but without a pelvic floor, we could not breathe, move our bodies, procreate, eliminate, absorb force, or even keep our organs internal! Sadly, scientists have named the nerve that gives feeling to the external genitalia, the skin around the anus, anal canal, and perineum the "Pudendal Nerve." In Latin it means, "parts to be ashamed of." Conversely, the triangular fusion of five bones ending in the coccyx—also known as the "Sacrum"—means sacred. We have the Egyptians to thank for that, as they considered the bone sacred to Osiris, the god of resurrection and agriculture.

As is the case for all animals with skeletons, the pelvis has undergone massive transformation. The human pelvis evolved because of bipedal locomotion. We went from mammals who walked on all fours to walking upright. The pelvic floor became a primary area for force absorption and movement. It was also now tasked with the job of being a hammock for our organs, previously the purview of the abdominals. The pelvis had to change shape to accommodate walking upright and childbirth. The pelvic floor is also a place for defecation and urination (elimination), but that has never changed. In a short amount of time, it became a place for movement, keeping things in, and letting things out. That is quite the job description!

How does the pelvis deal with all of these seemingly contradictory tasks? There are five joints, or places for movement in the pelvis. There are about 14 muscles in the pelvic floor, and they are arranged in three layers. There are three sphincters in women, two in men. There is a myriad of fascial connections to the pelvic floor, from the bottoms of your feet to your hands, and everything in-between. In a larger context, the pelvic floor is really the entire body. We tend to think of the body in a very divisive way: we isolate the systems, when in reality, the body is a connected network of nerves, fascia, bones, organs, tendon, ligaments, muscles, fluids, and cartilage. Pause and picture your entire body supporting your pelvic floor. Your pelvic floor is not alone!

Sadly, scientists have named the nerve that gives feeling to the external genitalia, the skin around the anus, anal canal, and perineum the "Pudendal Nerve." In Latin it means "parts to be ashamed of." Conversely, the triangular fusion of five bones ending in the coccyx—also known as the "Sacrum"—means sacred.

We've all heard the phrase, "sitting is the new smoking!" I dare say, standing and holding still in one position are the new smoking as well. We are a culture that does not make movement a priority and one that mistakes tension as strength. The result is the pelvic floor and organs suffer. We are told our pelvic floors are weak and we are given sphincter exercises called "Kegels," which can be helpful if done correctly, but most of us clench our pelvic floors and create tension. Too much tension makes our muscles weak. Muscles move bones. If our pelvic bones are not moving, we are not strengthening our pelvic floors. As stated before, the pelvic floor holds our organs like a hammock and needs to be buoyant. Thus, we need both concentric training (shortening contractions) like picking a baby up, and eccentric contractions (lengthening contraction) like putting a baby down. Research indicates that the eccentric phase makes us stronger. Breathing deeply using our diaphragm is great and easy pelvic floor exercise. We breathe about 20 thousand times a day, think how strong your pelvic floor could be if even 20% of those were deep, controlled breaths!

If you are interested in learning to train your pelvic floor, come to my Pelvic Power FM® workshop and learn:

- Key exercises for a flexible and powerful pelvic floor
- How to optimize the coordination of your muscle's fascia and joints during pelvic floor training
- How breathing can boost the effectiveness of pelvic floor training
- How to integrate pelvic floor training with core strength
- How training your pelvic floor can be effective at removing tension from your lower back and taking the pressure off of your knees

We've all heard the phrase, "sitting is the new smoking!" I dare say, standing and holding still in one position are the new smoking as well.

The Franklin Method®, created by Eric Franklin has been recognized and cited by the scientific community. It is an evidence-based approach to improving our overall function and movement and increasing our ability to see clearly how to improve its function. As Eric Franklins says, "better information, better navigation." The first step to change starts in the mind. The brain is an anticipation machine that helps us to respond to what we want and need. Proprioception is key. Franklin said, "We cannot change what we cannot feel." We get better at what we practice and what do we do most of the time (sitting, standing, walking, breathing, and thinking). Our daily habits are practiced 24 hours a day. Wouldn't it be a good plan to do those habits well? Using DNI Dynamic Neurocognitive Imagery, we get the brain on board with creating change in our bodies and lives.

Suzanne Willets Brooks earned her BS in Dance and Education from Eastern Michigan University. She received certifications in massage therapy through the Green Mountain Institute and Body Wisdom School. She is a certified GYROTONIC®, GYROKENISIS®, Pilates educator, and a Level 4 Franklin Method® therapist. She teaches workshops and classes at both Ann Arbor's Move Wellness and at Recentered Pilates and Movement Therapy. For more information about how The Franklin Method® can help you or to book a workshop, please contact Suzanne Willets Brooks at suzannebodywise@gmail.com.

Death and Dying continued...

Death Café with Rev. Annie Kopko • Tuesday, May 6; June 3; July 1 • 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. • A group-directed discussion of death, with no agenda, objectives, or themes. It is a discussion group rather than a grief-support or counseling session. FREE, but donations are gratefully received. For more information visit interfaithspirit.org.

Ann Arbor Death Café with Merilynne Rush • Saturday, May 17; June 21; July 19; August 16 • 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • Conversation about all things related to death and dying. Participants join in small and large group discussion with deep listening and sharing from the heart. No agenda, no presentation. Coffee, tea, snack available. Open to all adults. Accessible, confidential. Please note, this is not a grief support group. FREE. For more information visit DeathCafe.com.

End-of-life Doula Training with Merilynne Rush • Wednesday, July 16, 23, & 30; August 6, 13, & 20 • 4 to 7:30 p.m. • Learn from an experienced doula and hospice nurse and a diverse team of facilitators. 100-page study guide includes resources on how to set up a business. No prior experience necessary. We emphasize practical aspects of caregiving, addressing the whole person and their "family," and culturally and LGBTQ-sensitive care. $725; scholarships and payment plans available. For more information contact Merylinne at (734) 395-9660, email thedyingyear@gmail.com, or visit TheDyingYear.org.

Drumming

14th Annual Drum and Dance Jam with Curtis Glatter • Sunday, May 4; June 7; August 3 • 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. • Drumming improves musicality, hand/eye coordination, and cognition; relieves stress, and enhances spiritual joy in all ages! No experience is necessary. Bring a drum, or use one provided by the event. $5. For more information visit interfaithspirit.org.

Drummunity with Lori Fithian • Saturday, May 17; June 21; July 19; August 16 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join us for drumming, singing, and maybe dancing. All ages welcome. This is a family friendly event with focus on fun, rhythm games, and community-building activities. No experience expected! Drums provided or bring your own. FREE, $5 suggested donation. For more information contact Lori at (734) 426-7818 or email lorifithian@mac.com.

Energy and Healing

Chi Kung (Qigong) with Master Wasentha Young • Ongoing Tuesdays from 6 to 7:00 p.m. AND/OR Thursdays from 10 to 11:00 a.m. • The Wild Goose Qigong Form—continuous movement using imagery, yogic like stretching, touching acu-points, and engaging with universe, nature, and earth energies. Come Tuesdays (hybrid) and/or Thursdays (in-person) same price. $215 for the semester. For more information contact the Peaceful Dragon School at (734) 741-0695, email info@peacefuldragonschool.com, or visit peacefuldragonschool.com.

"THE EARTH IS LIKE A CHILD THAT KNOWS POEMS BY HEART."
–Rainer Maria

Brain Doodle Tune Ups for Groups Online with Debra Metler • Saturday, May 3,10, & 24; June 7, 14, 21, & 28; July 12,19, & 26; August 2, 9,16, & 23 • 11 a.m. to Noon • Brain Doodle Tune Ups utilize the healing power of doodling to reduce stress, improve cognitive abilities, increase creativity, and more. Your group of friends or relatives will enjoy doodling activities during a one hour, refreshing, online workshop with Debra Metler MSW, CHC. Minimum of 3 people/group workshop. $15 for each group member or workshop. For more information contact Debra at (248) 819-2131, email debmetler@gmail.com, or visit guffaw.square.site.

Debbie's Doodle Parties for Groups Online with Debra Metler • Wednesday, May 7,14, 21, & 28; June 4,11,18, & 25, July 9,16, 23, & 30; August 5,12,19, & 26 • 8 to 9:00 p.m. • Debbie's Doodle Parties for Groups Online by Debra Metler MSW, CHC are a lot of fun and can help you keep your brain healthy at the same time. Each online Doodle Party is 1 hour long and full of interactive doodling activities, and more. Invite friends, etc. to party with you (minimum of 3 total). $15 for each group member/Doodle Party. For more information contact Debra at (248) 819-2131, email debmetler@gmail.com, or visit guffaw.square.site.

Introduction to the Emotion & Body Code with Amanda Bate • Wednesday, May 7 • 6 to 7:00 p.m. • Join us at Crazy Wisdom Bookstore for an enlightening event where you'll learn about the powerful tools of the Emotion Code and the Body Code. Discover how these methods can help you release trapped emotions and restore balance to your mind and body. Whether you're new to energy healing or looking to deepen your understanding, this event is perfect for anyone curious about holistic approaches to wellness. Don't miss out on this opportunity to explore the fascinating world of energy medicine! FREE. For more information contact Amanda at bateconsultingllc@gmail.com or visit heal.me/bateconsultingllc.

SUZANNE WILLETS BROOKS earned her degree in dance and education at EMU. She studied and taught many forms of dance, creating choreography and performing professionally for 30 years. Her interest in understanding how the body, emotions, and mind integrate in the healing process has led to certifications in modalities including yoga and massage therapy. Brooks continued her journey with certifications in Pilates, GYROKENISIS®, GYROTONIC®, and finally as an evidence based level 4 Franklin Method ® therapist. She currently teaches workshops, anatomy for movement educators, and privately instructs at Move Wellness and Fitness and Recentered Pilates & Movement Therapy. In her spare time, she loves to be grandma to her grandbaby, Maximillian, grow food and flowers in her "yarden", write poetry, and create art from nature. For more information, or to hear about her Pelvic Floor workshop in May (see page 103 under the header Exercise and Fitness), contact Suzanne at suzannebodywise@gmail.com. And don't miss her Pelvic Power essay on the opposite page!

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Energy and Healing continued...

Gentle Qigong with Rory Walsh • Saturday, May 10 & 31; June 7, 14, 21, & 28; July 12 & 19; August 9, 16, & 23 • 11 to 11:45 a.m. • Join us for a harmonizing flow of head-to-toe movement, meditation, and self-acupressure to help you to center and navigate the changing seasons. It is a fun and invigorating self-care practice for all ages and experience levels. Free on May 10! From May 31, $15 Drop-in, $95 for full term of seven classes. For more information contact Rory at info@momentuscoaching.com or visit momentuscoaching.com.

Aura & Chakra Photography with Annette Schilz • Saturday, May 10 OR June 14 • 1 to 6:00 p.m. • Energetic readings are generated by the use of biofeedback software through the use of a hand sensor which converts this data into a detailed representation of the aura colors, chakras, and other energetic readings. You'll receive a 4x6 photo of both your current aura and chakras, with a brief color/chakra description to take with you. $35. For more information contact Annette at (517) 605-9720, email contact@wholisticconnection.com, or visit WholisticConnection.com.

Acupuncture & Sound with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Sunday, May 18 • 6 to 7:30 p.m. • Rob Meyer-Kukan from 7 Notes Natural Health will be joined by Lauren Hoffman from Whole-Self Wellness, LLC to share an afternoon of resonance and release. Relax into the tones of singing bowls, gongs, chimes, and more while receiving acupuncture. $50. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

The Healing Feast: Rest Experience and Potluck with Sari Brown • Monday, May 23 • 5 to 8:00 p.m. • A communal "rest experience" with music, movement, and guided healing practices around the theme of Resting in the Divine Feminine. Potluck at 5 pm. Sliding scale tickets for the program which begins at 6:30 pm. All genders & ages welcome. Sliding scale adults: $11 - $44, children: $5. For more information email thehealingfeastofconnection@gmail.com.

Exercise and Fitness

MOVE Upstairs Grand Opening with Elaine Economou & Robin Krienke • Thursday, May 1 through Saturday, May 31 • Special offers on our upstairs classes which will include yoga, Pilates, and GYROKINESIS® classes. Price depends on class package chosen. For more information contact MOVE Wellness at (734)224-2560 or email office@movewellness.com.

ROB MEYER-KUKAN is passionate about holding sacred space. Meyer-Kukan is the owner and bodyworker/natural health consultant at 7 Notes Natural Health. He has a unique set of skills ranging from massage therapy, reiki, and reflexology to sound therapy, color therapy, meditation, and mindfulness, and natural health consultations. Meyer-Kukan is a licensed massage therapist and a sound therapist. He has earned numerous certifications and trained in various modalities including Reiki (Level III trained), color therapy, reflexology, craniosacral therapy, aromatherapy, cacao facilitation, meditation and mindfulness practices, naturopathy, and more.

Meyer-Kukan hosts sound baths several times a month at 7 Notes Natural Health and in various other locations. In his spare time, Meyer-Kukan enjoys fostering his love of nature, animals, and learning through hiking, spending time with his pets, photography, and reading. In 2025, 7 Notes Natural Health is celebrating 10 years of being in business. Learn more about Rob Meyer-Kukan and the services he offers at 7 Notes Natural Health by visiting him online at 7notesnaturalhealth.com. You can also follow him on Facebook and Instagram @Robmeyerkukan. Contact Meyer-Kukan by email at rob@robmeyerkukan.com or call (248) 962-5475. Read Meyer-Kukan's essay, A Daily Dose of Sound, Vibration, and Frequency in issue #85 of *The Crazy Wisdom Journal* online at crazywisdomjournal.com/thecrazywisdomjournalonline/2024/1/1/a-daily-dose-of-sound-vibration-and-frequency.

Pelvic Power with Suzanne Willets Brooks • Saturday, May 31 • 1 to 4:00 p.m. • The evidence-based Franklin Method® pelvic power class will help you understand and embody the anatomy of the pelvis, hip joints, sacrum, and the pelvic floor. We will use Dynamic neurocognitive imagery, proprioception, and efficient movement patterning to help you move with more ease and feel at home in your body. $100. For more information contact Suzanne (734) 323-9664 or email suzannebodywise@gmail.com.

Festivals and Fairs

Enlightened Soul 2-Day Holistic Psychic Fair with Amy Garber and the Enlightened Soul Center • The Weekends of May 3 & 4,17 & 18; June 7 & 8, 21 & 22; July 12 & 13, 26 & 27; August 9 & 10, 23 & 24 • Saturday from Noon to 6:00pm, Sunday from Noon to 5:00 p.m.• We have a selection of readers and healers for your enjoyment, along with visiting vendors for shopping! What a great way to explore a variety of readings and healings at one time, under one roof. Plus, energy healers, shopping, FREE snacks & parking. You choose the session length. Readers: $2/minute, 15-minute minimum. Entrance fee, Saturday $5, Sunday $3. For more information contact Amy at (734) 358-0218, email amy@enlightenedsoulcenter.com, or visit enlightenedsoulcenter.com.

Lavender Harvest Festival with Joe Pusta • Saturday, July 12 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. & Sunday, July 13 from Noon to 4:00 p.m. • Lavender festival featuring U-PICK lavender, 50+ artisans, food trucks, live music, lavender lemonade, 100+ lavender products made on our farm. $10. For more information contact Joe at Joe (734)239-2213, email lavenderlanemi.com, or visit joe@lavenderlanemi.com.

Japanese Bon Festival at Cranbrook #MIBON2025 with Great Lakes Taiko Center • Sunday, August 10 • 1 to 5:30 p.m. • A Michigan community celebration of the Japanese Bon Festival featuring Bon Odori folk dancing and demonstrations, Japanese Taiko drumming and music, and cultural booths for all to enjoy at the historic grounds of the Cranbrook Japanese Garden in Bloomfield Hills, MI. FREE. For more information contact Great Lakes Taiko Center at (248) 773-8899, email gltc@greatlakestaiko.org, or visit michigantaiko.net.

Film

Free Film & Discussion with Jewel Heart Instructors • Friday, May 9, June 13, July 11, & August 8 • 7 to 9:15 p.m. • FREE, concessions available. Film schedule is as follows:

- May: *The Cup*. A tale of a monastery whose doors are opened when a group of boys are unable to stifle their love for soccer.
- June: *Soul*. Joe is a band teacher whose life hasn't gone the way he expected. When he visits another realm, he discovers what soul really means.
- July: *Perfect Days*. Hirayama cleans toilets, but he notices and appreciates small wonders -- the sun, sunlight, and children laughing.
- August: *Hidden Figures*. Three African American mathematicians help an astronaut launch into orbit while dealing with discrimination.

For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Herbal Medicine

Herbal Medicine Series with Mary Light • Saturday, July 19 through December • 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. • Hands on experiential teachings of herbs, herbal medicine, body systems, apothecary skills, and more. $1,500. For more information contact Mary Light at (734) 769-7794 or visit naturopathicschoolofannarbor.net.

Holistic Health

Steiner Health Life Force Intensive Health Retreat with Steiner Health • Monday, April 28 through Saturday, May 10 • This two-week intensive session is designed for ambulatory individuals with a variety of ailments, chronic illnesses or anyone seeking a restorative regimen. $5300-$7200. For more information contact the Steiner Health Center at (734) 663-4365, email rshc@steinerhealth.org, or visit steinerhealth.org.

Intuitive and Psychic Development

Psychic Psychology Women's Group: Teleconference with John Friedlander & Gloria Hemsher • Tuesday, May 6; June 3; July 1; August 5 • 7 to 8:00 p.m. • For Women Only: Meditation concentrating on women's issues relative to biological energies as well as that of the aura. See website for teleconference number and billing information. $10. For more information contact Violeta at (734) 476-1513 or visit psychicpsychology.com.

Focused Mind Meditation: Teleconference with John Friedlander • Sunday, May 4; June 1; July 6; August 3 • 9:00 a.m. to Noon • Development of sustained focused meditation makes it easy to develop a whole new magnitude of psychic skill and healing, as well as a new level of mental clarity and spiritual openness. $15, see website for payment information. For more information contact Violeta at (734) 476-1513 or visit psychicpsychology.com.

Summer Intensive: Webinar & Teleconference with John Friedlander • Thursday, July 17 & Friday, July 18 from 7 to 9:00 p.m., Saturday, July 19 & Sunday, July 20, from 10:00 a.m. to Noon & 2 to 4:00 p.m. • New material introduced with continued development of advanced and core techniques seeking a natural sense of skill in everyday life. Prerequisite: Level 1 Psychic Development class, CD set, or permission or instructor. $275. For more information contact Gilbert at gchoud@yahoo.com or visit psychicpsycholcogy.org.

Massage

Baby Massage Class with Irene's Myomassology Institute • Saturday, May 17 • 10:00 a.m. to Noon • In this class you'll learn how Infant Massage benefits you and your baby. During class, the teacher will demonstrate how to perform massage and assist you as you massage your baby! You will learn techniques to calm your baby, ease colic, and congestion. This is a wonderful way to deepen your bond with your child. $30. For more information contact the Institute at (248)350-1400, email contact@irenes.edu, or email irenes.edu.

Meditation

Community Sound Bath with Rob-Meyer Kukan • Friday, May 2 & 16; June 6; July 11 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for this sound bath meditation where he will use singing bowls, gongs, and more to create a gentle soundscape perfect for deep relaxation and peace. Yoga mats and one yoga blanket are provided for each attendee. Please bring any additional supports you would like for your comfort (pillows, bolster, eye pillow, etc). $40. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

A Day of Mindfulness Meditation with Esther Kennedy • Saturday, May 3; June 7; August 2 • 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. • Join our mindfulness community as we deepen our understanding of and commitment to daily meditation practice. Reflecting upon our relationships with honesty and courage, we amplify our capacity to be loved within family, neighborhood, city, and world. $35.00, Lunch included. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517)266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Meditation on Compassion with Khenpo Tshering Chophel • Ongoing Saturdays • 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. • Meditation on compassion opens our hearts to genuinely care for all beings. Recognizing that everyone shares the wish to be happy and free from suffering, we practice broadening our focus beyond our own wellbeing. Ongoing; participants can attend whenever they wish; no prior meditation experience necessary. FREE, donations accepted. For more information contact Lama Nancy at (734) 649-2127, email lamanancy@karunabuddhistcenter.org, or visit karunabuddhistcenter.org.

Healing and Compassion Meditations with Hartmut Sagolla • Monday, May 5, 12, & 19; June 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30; July 7, 14, & 28; August 4, 11, 18, & 25 • Noon to 1:00 p.m. • Hartmut Sagolla leads a 30–40-minute guided meditation on a Buddhist theme followed by discussion. Meditations are centered around healing oneself and others and developing compassion. They include concentrated meditation, visualization, and contemplative meditations. Online only. FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

White Tara Guided Healing Meditation with Jewel Heart Instructors • Sunday, May 4, 11, 18, & 25; June 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29; July 6, 13, & 20; August 3, 10, 17, 24, & 31 • 9:30 to 10:35 a.m. • Tara is the mother goddess of Tibetan Buddhism, known for her quick and compassionate activity. White Tara is particularly associated with healing and long life. These guided meditations use visualization techniques to overcome physical, mental, and emotional suffering. FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Day of Meditation with Carol Blotter • Saturday, June 7 OR August 23 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Experience some peace and calm in a wooded setting with silent sitting and walking in a meditative manner. Meditation instruction available. Suggested Donation of $30-60; pay what you can. Event held at the Michigan Friends Center, 1125 Long Lake Road, Chelsea. For more information email manager@mfcenter.org.

Movement and Dance

World Labyrinth Day: Labyrinth Tour with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Saturday, May 3 • 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. • This year's labyrinth tour will feature a handheld/finger labyrinth walk, two labyrinths on personal/private property, and a public labyrinth on the grounds of a church in the Ann Arbor area. Schedule: 10a.m. – presentation with finger labyrinth walk at 7 Notes; 11 a.m. – depart for various locations; 2:30 p.m. - final thoughts/wrap up; 3 pm – departure. $45. For more information contact Rob Meyer-Kukan at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Music, Sound, and Voice

Live Music Fridays with Stuart Benbow • Ongoing Fridays • 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. • Live Music in the Celestial Lounge at Crazy Wisdom Bookstore hosted by Stuart Benbow. New acts every week! Everyone welcome, donations requested. For more information email events@crazywisdom.net.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HORIZON?

The Importance of Your Rising Sign in Astrology

By Sam Oakwell

What's your zodiac sign? If someone's asked you this, you've probably answered with your sun sign–the zodiac sign the sun was in at the time of your birth. According to a recent Harris poll, 95% of Americans know their sun sign and almost two-thirds believe that their sun sign is an "accurate description of themselves."

While your sun sign can certainly speak to aspects of your identity and core self, traditional astrology places equal (and possibly greater!) emphasis on the rising sign. This is the sign that contains the ascendent, which is the degree of the zodiac that was rising in the sky when a person was born. Learning about your rising sign can help you understand your astrological chart in a deeper way and provide crucial insights about how you show up in the world, what areas of life present the greatest strength and difficulties for you, and when key events that will affect your life will happen.

In ancient astrology, the rising sign was called the *horoskopos*, or "hour-marker," because it marks the specific time when the heavens came into contact with the earth to bring about your worldly existence. Perhaps for this reason, the Greek word *horoskopos* can also refer to your entire astrological chart and serves as the root word for the English word "horoscope." This connection between your rising sign and the nature of your overall chart is also apparent if we consider the role the rising sign plays in determining where different signs appear in any given astrological chart.

WHILE YOUR SUN SIGN CAN CERTAINLY SPEAK TO ASPECTS OF YOUR IDENTITY AND CORE SELF, TRADITIONAL ASTROLOGY PLACES EQUAL (AND POSSIBLY GREATER!) EMPHASIS ON THE RISING SIGN.

Astrology divides the chart into twelve houses, each representing a different area of life, such as relationships, career, and home. There are many ways to calculate houses, but the system most favored by the ancients is what we now call "Whole Sign" houses, which assigns each house to a sign of the zodiac. In this system, the rising sign will always correspond to the first house, with the rest of the houses corresponding to signs following the first house in the order the sun, moon, and planets move through them. For example, if your first house is Aries, your second house will be Taurus, your third house will be Gemini, and so on. Your rising sign thus determines which zodiac sign all of the houses in your chart correspond to.

As opposed to your sun sign, which can symbolize the nature of your inner light, your rising sign speaks more to how you interact with the world and are perceived by others. For example, someone with a Leo sun might feel bold, confident, and creative at their core, but if they have Virgo as their rising sign, they could generally come across to others as more reserved, detail-oriented, and thoughtful. Understanding the interplay between your rising sign and your sun sign can help paint a more complete picture of who you are than you'd get by only considering your sun sign.

Knowing your rising sign can also lend more context to how your sun sign might express itself, relative to the rest of your chart. As I mentioned earlier, your rising sign determines the house that each sign corresponds to in the Whole Sign house system. If you know what house your sun is in, you can get a much better sense of how it functions in your overall chart. For instance, if your sun sign corresponds to your twelfth house, which represents things that are hidden or unconscious, then you might be drawn to introspection, spirituality, or behind-the-scenes work, and you might feel as though others are often unaware of your unique contributions. On the other hand, if your sun sign corresponds to your first house, which would make it the same as your rising sign, then you might seem naturally charismatic and accept leadership positions with relative ease. Your rising sign thus acts as a guide for understanding not just how you present yourself but also how the rest of your chart—including your sun sign—fits into the larger picture.

IN ANCIENT ASTROLOGY, THE RISING SIGN WAS CALLED THE HOROSKOPOS, OR "HOUR–MARKER," BECAUSE IT MARKS THE SPECIFIC TIME WHEN THE HEAVENS CAME INTO CONTACT WITH THE EARTH TO BRING ABOUT YOUR WORLDLY EXISTENCE.

You can learn even more about your rising sign by considering its planetary ruler, which is often called your "chart ruler." In traditional astrology, each sign is associated with a planet, which is said to rule it. For example, Virgo is ruled by Mercury, Libra by Venus, and Scorpio by Mars. The planet ruling your rising sign is thought to act as the captain of your chart, steering your life's direction. By paying attention to the position of that planet in your natal chart and looking at how it moves through the sky, you can gain additional insight into areas of life and periods of time that will be significant for you.

Finding your rising sign is simple with the right tools. All you need is your birth date, time, and location, which should be as exact as possible. With this information, you can use free astrology websites like Astro.com or AstroSeek.com to calculate your full natal chart in the Whole Sign house system, including your rising sign. The chart calculated by these tools will also display your houses and the positions of each planet in your chart, including your sun and your chart ruler. This should help you gain a more nuanced level of familiarity with your chart, going beyond just knowing your sun sign.

Sam Oakwell has been fascinated by the stars and planets since he was a small child and studied philosophy, classics, and the history of astronomy in academic settings. Oakwell approaches readings through a grounded, compassionate, and humanistic perspective aimed at opening doors and indicating possibilities for the client.

To learn more about what your rising sign and overall chart reveals about you from the perspective of ancient and medieval astrology, consider booking a reading with Sam Oakwell at oakwellastrology.com. He can also answer questions about specific areas of your life, including career, finances, and romantic relationships, and guide you through timing techniques like annual profections, transits, and solar returns which can help you understand what the year ahead has in store.

AS OPPOSED TO YOUR SUN SIGN, WHICH CAN SYMBOLIZE THE NATURE OF YOUR INNER LIGHT, YOUR RISING SIGN SPEAKS MORE TO HOW YOU INTERACT WITH THE WORLD AND ARE PERCEIVED BY OTHERS.

Music, Sound, and Voice continued...

Sound Bath Meditation with Michelle Camilleri • Thursday, May 1; June 5; July 3; August 7 • 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. • Immerse yourself in sound bath therapy with 432hz crystal singing bowls and other sound tools at Up Stairs at Crazy Wisdom. Will promote deep relaxation while fostering a sense of well-being. Bring a yoga mat, blanket, pillow, and eye mask. $30. For more information follow @soleful77 on Instagram, text (917) 842-2409, email michelle.camilleri26@gmail.com

Sound Immersion: A Gong Meditation with Sharon Harris & Dana Piper • Saturday, May 3 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • A one-hour, sonic journey using gongs and many other instruments. Lie on the floor or sit in a chair. Bring a mat, pad, cushion, pillow, and /or blanket for your comfort. Simply let go, and let the sounds do the work. The experience is effortless, and the results can be profound. $20. For more information visit interfaithspirit.org.

Sound Bath at the PARC with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Sunday, May 4 • 7 to 8:15 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for this sound bath meditation at the PARC in downtown Plymouth. Rob will play metal and crystal singing bowls, with chimes, and more in a sound bath that will wash you with sounds intended to bring calming vibrations to reduce stress and ease tension celebrating our beautiful, creative, and amazing emotions. $45. For more information contact Rob Meyer-Kukan at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Open Mic with Dzanc House • Thursday, May 8; June 19; July 17; August 14 • 6 to 8:00 p.m. • Share your poetry, short stories, or songs at Dzanc House! Open Mic is a monthly time of sharing and caring for one another in a meaningful way. FREE. For more information email Dzanc house at gallery@dzancbooks.org.

Singing for Comfort with Layla Ananda • Friday, May 8; June 12; July 10; August 14 • 7 to 8:15 p.m. • We sing short, easy-to-learn, comforting songs, many of which come from the Threshold Choir repertoire. You can sing along, lead a song for our friendly, welcoming group (usually around a dozen people), or simply listen. No experience necessary. FREE, but donations are gratefully received. For more information visit interfaithspirit.org.

Cafe 704 with Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth • Saturday, May 10; June 14; July 12; August 9 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Live music in a smoke- and alcohol-free venue, in person and on Zoom. Schedule is as follows: Julie Beutel (May 10), Mary & Eric Fithian (June 14), Relics of the Future Past (July 12), Ken Kazora Quartet (August 9) $10. For more information contact the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth at interfaithspirit.org.

Release & Renew: A Sound Bath Experience with Martina Smith • Sunday, May 11 & 25; June 15 & 29; July 13 & 27; Aug 10 & 24 • 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. • Unwind and discover inner peace through the transformative power of sound. Immerse yourself in the soothing sounds of crystal bowls, gongs, binaural beats, curated frequencies, and more. These harmonious vibrations will promote deep relaxation and restoration, guiding you toward balance and inner harmony. In-person or on Zoom. $20 on Zoom, $30 advance discount, $40 at the door. For more information contact Martina at (313)406-7928 or email info@wellnessandsound.com.

Community Sing with Matt Watroba • Wednesday, May 14; June 11 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • You don't need to be a good singer (whatever that means), you just need to have a love for it. Donations are gratefully received. For more information contact Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth at interfaithspirit.org or visit mattwatroba.net.

Resonant Relaxation: Daytime Sound Bath with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Wednesday, May 21 • 10 to 11:00 a.m. • Are you a busy parent who loves sound baths; but can't attend an event in the evening? Do you have a job that requires evening hours? Are you just plain busy? This hour-long sound bath is for you! $30. For more information contact Rob Meyer-Kukan at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

A Gift of Song with The Threshold Singers of Ann Arbor • Sunday, June 1 • 4 to 5:15 p.m. • Experience loving song wherever you are in life's journey. As you sit or recline, the Threshold Singers share peaceful, soothing music to bring you comfort and support in meeting life's challenges. We then invite you to quietly sing along to a few of our songs. Please arrive before 4 p.m. to park and settle in. FREE, donations appreciated. For more information contact the Threshold Singers at (734) 531-7960 or visit thresholdchoirofannarbor.org.

Solstice Celebration: All Night Puja with 7 Notes Natural Health • Saturday, June 21 from 9:00 p.m. through Sunday, June 22 at 7:00 a.m. • A sound bath is a powerful tool for self-healing. A Puja is a deep all night sound bath meditation. Created by Rob Meyer-Kukan, Deanna Bordeau, and Lauren Hoffman, a puja consists of multiple consecutive sound bath sessions and lasts around 10 hours total. $125. For more information contact Rob Meyer-Kukan at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Flower Sound Bath with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Friday, August 1 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Celebrate the beauty of flowers with this flower themed sound bath! Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for this sound bath meditation where he will use singing bowls, gongs, and more to create a gentle soundscape perfect for deep relaxation and peace. This collaboration is done with Ypsilanti's We Adore Flowers. $45. For more information contact Rob Meyer-Kukan at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Crazy Wisdom Poetry Series

Hosted by Edward Morin, David Jibson, and Lissa Perrin

Second and Fourth Wednesday of each month, 7-9 p.m.

Second Wednesdays, 7-9 p.m.: Poetry Workshop. All writers welcome to share and discuss their poetry and short fiction. Sign-up for new participants begins 6:45 p.m.

Fourth Wednesdays, 7-9 p.m.: Featured Reader(s) for 50 minutes. Open Mic reading for 1 hour. All writers welcome to share their own or other favorite poetry. Sign-up begins at 6:45 p.m.

All sessions are virtual and accessible through Zoom. Email cwpoetrycircle@gmail.com for Zoom link.

Featured readers

May 28 - Naomi Shihab Nye - Palestinian-American writer, editor and educator, grew up in St. Louis, Jerusalem, and San Antonio, TX. Teaches at Texas State University, has been Young People's Poet Laureate for the U.S., poetry editor for *New York Times* magazine and *The Texas Observer*, visiting writer in 100+ schools and communities all over the world. She has written or edited 30+ books, most recently *Grace Notes - Poems About Families*.

June 25 - Anita Skeen is the author of six volumes of poetry, including collaborations with visual artists such as *The Unauthorized Audubon* (2014), a collection of poems about imaginary birds accompanied by the linocuts of anthropologist/visual artist Laura B. DeLind. A professor in the Residential College of Michigan State University, Anita is director of its Center for Poetry.

July 23 - John Jeffire is the Detroit author of two novels and three poetry collections. His novel *Motown Burning* won the 2005 Mount Arrowsmith Novel Competition and the 2007 Independent Publishing Awards Gold Medal for Regional Fiction. In 2022, his novel *River Rouge* won the American Writing Award for Legacy Fiction. His recent poetry collection is *A Temple for Tomorrows*.

Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle

The Poetry Series is open to all.
There is never a charge.
https://cwcircle.poetry.blog/

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Music, Sound, and Voice continued...

Intro to Sound Therapy Workshop with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Saturday, August 23 • 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • In this workshop we will explore how healing with sound works. Participants will learn the basics of sound, the history of sound therapy, the tools used in sound therapy (specifically Himalayan singing bowls, crystal bowls, and gongs), and the applications for group and individual use of sound therapy. $325. For more information contact Rob Meyer-Kukan at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Nutrition and Food Medicine

An Evening with Local Author Gaia Kile • Wednesday, June 4 • 7:00 p.m. • in the Crazy Wisdom Upstairs Lounge • Kile is a widely known Family Nurse Practitioner, Former Board President of the Peoples Food Co-op, and Community Activist, who has been for decades a leader in Ann Arbor's holistic medicine, sustainability, healthy food/nutrition, cooperative living, personal growth, Non-Violent Communication, and political activism subcultures in the region. His newly published book, *Menu of Hope – Alternatives to the Food that is Destroying Our Planet*, will be featured. The evening will be a dynamic Q+A with longtime Crazy Wisdom co-owner, Bill Zirinsky, and with the audience, about Kile's book, about his journey through the decades, his current beliefs and concerns, and his vision for ways forward amid political volatility and climate change denialism. FREE.

Nutrition Evangelism with Valerie Thomas • Thursday, May 15; June 19; July 10 & 24; August 7 & 21 • 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. • Explain the role of specific nutrients that enter the body when a given food is consumed on health and healing. Single person $10; Couple $17; Triple $40. For more information contact Valarie at (734) 351-8892 or email ChE4theEarth@gmail.com.

Peace

Peace Generator with Craig Harvey • Friday, May 16; June 20; July 18; August 16 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Join our silent circle as we meditate on and pray for healing, miracles, and peace within ourselves and across the globe. Drop in at any time during this event. Donations gratefully received. For more information contact Craig at peacegenerator2001@gmail.com.

Personal Growth

Pearls of Wisdom with Master Wasentha Young • Monday, May 5; June 2; July 7, August 4 • 6 to 7:30 p.m. • Hosted by the Peaceful Dragon School, the first Monday of the month starting in May. We will start each session with Peaceful Dragon Rising Stretches respectively followed by a focus presentation in the following topics: Center, Cleanse, Revitalize. Master Wasentha Young; This Energy Body - Acupuncturist Abby Humphrey; Shadow Work for Liberation - Priestess Mara Evenstar; and Community Activism in 2025 - Anna Gersh. Donation driven - suggested $10. Location: 1945 Pauline Blvd., Suite B, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. For more information contact Peaceful Dragon School at (734) 741-0695, email info@peacefuldragonschool.com, or visit peacefuldragonschool.com.

Lunch & Learn with Jeremiah Davies & Cindy Schmucker • Wednesday, May 14 • 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. • Join Parks recreation Jeremiah Davies and Cindy Schmucker Parks and Recreation Assistant as they share all the great offerings of our parks including shelters, ball fields, rentals, playgrounds, and more! $10 Lunch included; or Free if you bring your own lunch. Register 2 days in advance if requesting a lunch. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

SHAMAN TOM
• Shamanic:
• Healing for People and Animals
• Animal Communication
• Energy Clearing of Places, Buildings, Businesses, etc.
• Compassion De-possession (Entity Removal)
• Curse Unraveling
• Reiki for People and Animals
734.945.0914 • tom@shamantom.com • shamantom.com

The Epidemic of Loneliness with Mindy Rodriquez • Wednesday, June 11 • 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. • In today's hyper-connected world, loneliness has emerged as a silent epidemic. This presentation will look at some of the causes; how to identify its presence, especially in the young and the elderly, and offer some actionable steps to foster more meaningful connections in their own communities and lives. $10 lunch included; Free if you bring your own lunch. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Lunch & Learn: The Amazing Outreach of Goodwill with Rebecca Melina • Wednesday, July 16 • 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. • Do you think Goodwill is just clothing? Think again! Rebecca Melina, from Goodwill, will amaze you by all the good things that Goodwill does! $10 lunch included; Free if you bring your own lunch. Please register 2 days in advance. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

A Practical Guide to Healthy Aging with Marianne Fahlman and Esther Kennedy • Tuesday, August 12 • 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. • Join Marianne Fahlman, OP and Esther Kennedy, OP as they share their learning on taking care of our bodies and our spirits. The day will include staying physically healthy, lessons on nutrition, and ways to reduce stress and increase mindfulness. Weather it's for yourself or for someone you're caring for, you will be glad you came. $35 includes lunch; scholarships available. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Lunch & Learn: There's Nothing Like a Good Massage! With Savvy Boyd & Kendra Crombez • Wednesday, August 13 • 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. • Massage Therapists will describe different massage therapies and their many benefits. $10 lunch included; Free if you bring your own lunch. Please register 2 days in advance. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Reiki

Usui System of Reiki Healing, First Degree with Suzy Wienckowski • Saturday, July 12 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. & Sunday, July 13 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Reiki is a gentle, hands-on healing practice that promotes balance and harmony of the Body/Mind/Spirit. Reiki is easily learned by all and after initiation by a Reiki Master healing energy flows effortlessly through your hands. Class includes the history of Reiki, treatment form for yourself and others, and individual initiations. $200. For more information contact Suzy (734) 476-7958 or email suzyreiki@aol.com.

Usui System of Reiki Healing, Second Degree with Suzy Wienckowski • Saturday, August 2 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. & Sunday, August 3 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • Second level of training in the Usui System of Reiki Healing. Students learn and are empowered to use the three sacred Reiki symbols. The symbols focus and intensify the Reiki energy enabling the practitioner to heal on a deeper level and to send Reiki at a distance. (First Degree training is a prerequisite.) $500. For more information contact Suzy (734) 476-7958 or email suzyreiki@aol.com.

Reiki Certification Training with Ashley Crawford and Paula Burke • Sunday, August 24 • 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. • Reiki Level 1 students are led through a step-by-step discovery of the practice, beginning with the concept that we are all capable of moving toward a state of balance and wellness. Reiki Level 2 training continues our learning tradition of lecture, discussions, self-treatment and clinical practice with classmates and the community. Level 1 $177; Level 2 $177; Both for $333. For more information contact Ashley (734) 444-8386 or email ashley.keymassage@gmail.com.

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Retreats

3 Day & 4 Day SW Lake Michigan Holistic Yoga and Meditation Retreats with Ann Arbor Yoga and Meditation • Thursday through Sunday, May 1 through 4; May 29 through June 1; July 17 through 20; & July 31 through August 3 • Our small group 3-Day and 4-Day retreats are for beginners and pros. Double room and some single room accommodations, vegetarian meals, and guided daily group classes are included in cost. Three-day retreat is $559, four- day is $749. Registration deadline ends three days before start date. For more information contact Ema at EmaStefanova@cs.com or visit YogaAndMeditation.com.

Cosmic Journey: Implications for Faith with Sharon Zayac • Sunday, May 18 through Thursday, May 22 • This retreat will be a time for input and reflection on our evolving story as humans and as people of faith. Delving into the unfolding Cosmic Creation Story offers us the opportunity to explore new insights into our faith, our understanding of sin, and the meaning of Jesus in our lives. Commuter: $180; Double Occupancy: $280; Single occupancy: $380; Continental breakfast included. Registration required. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Overnight Beginner's Zen Retreat with Ordained Dharma Teachers • Friday, May 23 & Sunday, May 24 • Held in the Temple's meditation hall, the course includes simple stretching exercises, work with the breath, meditation postures, concentration, and mindfulness practice. An overnight stay at the temple and breakfast is included. Cost is $160/$120 unwaged. For more information contact the Zen Temple at (734) 761-6520or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

The Heart's Journey: Meditative Techniques for Cultivating Compassion for Self and Others with Khenpo Tshering Chophel • Friday, July 18 through Sunday, July 20 • In this retreat you will learn visualizations and contemplations to further develop your capacity for compassion. Research shows that increasing compassion for yourself and others brings many health benefits and increases happiness and resilience. This retreat will benefit anyone who helps others at work, school, or home. $225 includes meals; optional overnight accommodations additional. No one turned away for lack of funds. For more information contact Lama Nancy at (734) 649-2127, email lamanancy@karunabuddhistcenter.org, or visit karunabuddhistcenter.org.

One Day Retreat with Dharma Teachers • Saturday, August 9 • 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • Unplug from media, put aside "to do lists and follow your urge to meditate, just sit. The schedule includes periods of sitting meditation, walking, mindful work practice, rest, and simple stretching with a delicious vegetarian lunch at midday. $50 (members) $60 (nonmembers). For more information contact the Zen Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Shamanism

Journey Circle with Judy Liu Ramsey • Thursday, May 1 & 15; June 5 & 19; July 3 & 17; August 7 & 21 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Shamanic group journeying for personal discovery and inner work. Required: basic journeying skills, which are not taught in these sessions. Apply to attend by emailing info@JudyRamsey.net. Held online via Zoom. $25 per session or $40 per month. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net.

Ancestors: The Power Within with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday, May 3 & Sunday, May 4 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Ancestors can be powerful allies in your practice. Healing our ancestral lines can help us heal ourselves and our families. Deepen your connection with the grandmothers and grandfathers in ceremony, in initiation and in the shamanic journey. Prerequisite: basic journeying skills. $200 per person, $100 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net.

Cycles of Life with Connie Lee Eiland • Saturday, May 3 from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. & Sunday, May 4 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Cycles of Life presents pathways to help with you own life explorations and healing. We will work with the Medicine Wheel, the Spirit and cycles of the Moon, and our Circle of Ancestors. This class includes sacred art, healing, divination, and ceremony.

Art by Anthony Powers

Baseball, it is said, is only a game. True. And the Grand Canyon is only a hole in Arizona.

–George Will

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The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Ability to journey is required. $200 until April 19; $230 after. For more information contact Connie at 248-809-3230 or email clshebear7@gmail.com.

Shamanic Healing for Animals with Judy Liu Ramsey • Tuesday, May 6, 13, 20, & 27; June 3, 10, 17, & 24; July 1 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Unique animal healing that draws upon core shamanic practices. Students develop a toolkit within a supportive, and experiential learning framework of instruction from a professional animal communicator who also practices shamanism. Prerequisite: journeying basics. Knowledge of animal communication not necessary. Class taught via Zoom. $425 per person, $225 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net.

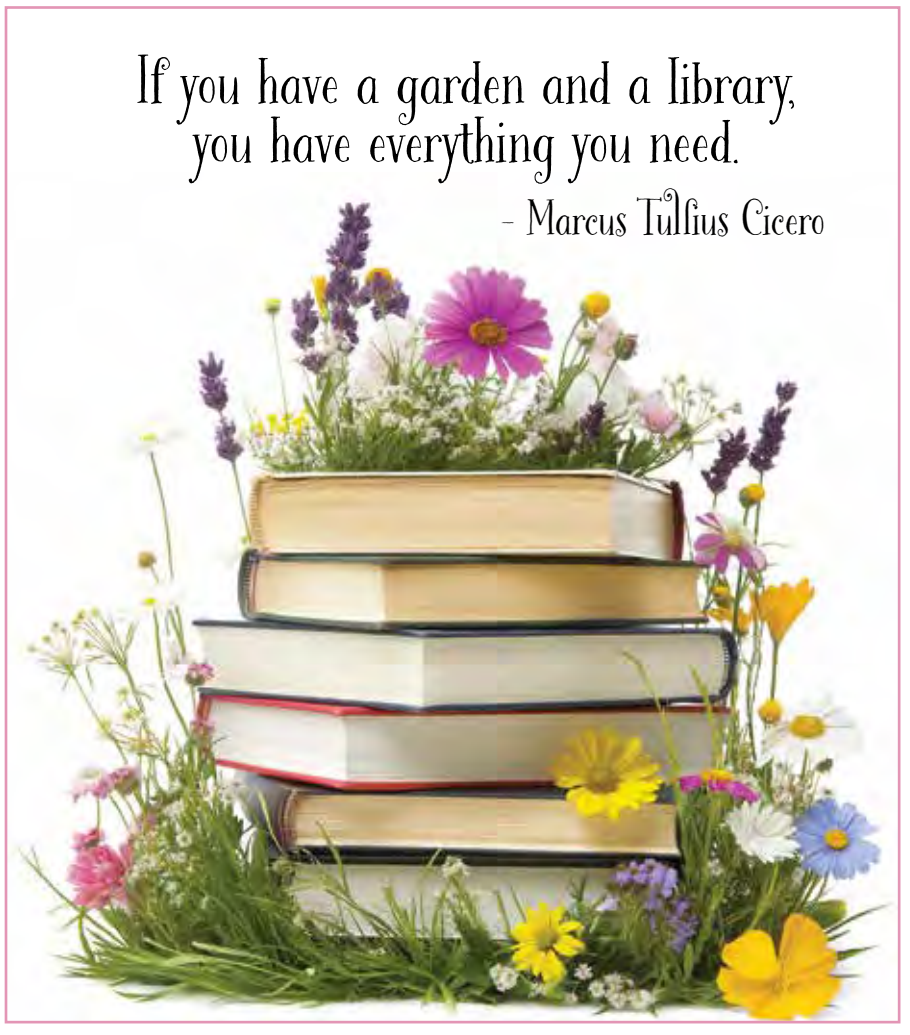
Introduction to Journeying with Connie Lee Eiland • Sunday, May 18 OR August 10 • 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • This 6-hour class includes Power Animal retrieval and journeying to Upper, Lower, and Middle Worlds. Journeying is with drums and rattles. Class is in-person. $80 until two weeks before; $100 after. For more information contact Connie at 248-809-3230 or email clshebear7@gmail.com.

Shamanic Gardening with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday, May 31 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • From vision to harvest, take steps to manifest your life dreams and goals through shamanic gardening. Learn how to work with blocks and challenges so that everything contributes to your growth and synchronizes with your own pace and flow. Pre-requisite: basic journeying skills. The class is taught via Zoom. $150 per person, $75 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net

Basic Journeying: The Art of Shamanism for Practical and Visionary Purposes in Daily Life with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday, June 21 & Sunday, June 22 • 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. • Shamanic journeying is an easy tool to access spiritual information. Learn to develop a self-directed practice of empowerment, so you can move safely through the world in a balanced way. Meet a power animal who wants to help you in your life. This class is prerequisite to advanced shamanic studies. Class is taught via Zoom. $180 per person, $90 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net

Healing with Spiritual Light with Connie Lee Eiland • Saturday, June 21 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. & Sunday, June 22 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m • In Healing with Spiritual Light, we become the Light. We transfigure. This class brings in quantum physics as we work with the unlimited powers of the universe and the Law of Resonance. This method doesn't see the client as ill. Class created by Sandra Ingerman. $200 until June 7; $230 after. For more information contact Connie at 248-809-3230 or email clshebear7@gmail.com.

Extraction: Illness & Healing from a Shamanic Perspective with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday and Sunday, July 19 & 20, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • Advanced online class with a limit of 6 persons. Deepen understanding of illness and how one's spirit helps the body thrive or not. Focus is on power loss and extraction of misplaced energy. Explore ways to identify and heal illness. Prerequisites: Basic Journeying, Medicine for the Earth/ Healing with Spiritual Light. Class taught via Zoom. $300 per person, $150 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net



Ancestors & Descendants with Conne Lee Eiland • Saturday, July 19 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. & Sunday, July 20 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m • Ancestors and Descendants investigates our connections to our Circle of Ancestors and Descendants in ways that impact our health and wellbeing and those who follow us. This class includes journeys, sacred art, healing, and ceremony. Cycles of Life is a prerequisite. $200 until July 5; $230 after. For more information contact Connie at 248-809-3230 or email clshebear7@gmail.com.

Basic Telepathic Animal Communication with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday & Sunday, August 2 & 3 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Enhance your relationship to wild animals as well as to your own companions. Learn to communicate with animals the way they communicate with each other telepathically. Discover and deepen your intuitive skills step-by-step in a supportive environment. Class is via Zoom. $180 per person, $90 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net

Shamanic Healing for Animals II with Judy Liu Ramsey • Tuesday, August 5, 12, 19, & 26 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Deepen your shamanic techniques working with animals' ancestors and the elements for conditions like dementia. Psychopomp and grief/loss for animals will be covered in depth. Pre-requisite: Shamanic Healing for Animals I. The class is taught via Zoom. $325 per person, $160 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit judyramsey.net

Spiritual Development

Engage Spirit Within: Your Superpower with Ruth Wilson • Tuesday, May 6 • 2 to 2:45 p.m. • Learn to recognize your intuitive and creative inner genius; a state that shifts your focus to creating more of what you want and away from problems. This one step is encouraging and reduces resistance. FREE. For more information contact Ruth at mailruthwilson@gmail or visit ruth-wilson.com.

Intuitive Development using a Pendulum Workshop with Phoenix Duffy • Sunday, May 18 • 2 to 5:00 p.m. • Come gain an understanding of basic intuitive development principles; creation and alignment of your own Spirit Team, calibration of your Pendulum as a tool; instructions how to use it, what to ask and how to ask questions. Learn how to interpret the answers in freeform, using charts, and on the chakras of the body and much more! $75. For more information contact Phoenix at (734) 765-5830, email phoenix@threebutterflies.org, or visit Threebutterflies.org.

A Water Pilgrimage: Transforming Your Life, and the World through Water with Amanda Anastasia • Wednesday, June 11 OR Saturday, August 9 OR 16 OR 23 • 9:00 am to 4:00 p.m. • Water is waiting for your prayer. If you are looking for deep, sustainable transformation in your inner and outer world, the crystal-clear water of Northern Michigan is calling. This retreat will take place in the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore. We will engage in earth-based ceremonies designed to create a New Earth. The world is lovingly ready. $160/day, lodging not included. For more information contact Amanda at amahessling@gmail.com.

Become an Ordained Minister in the Order of Melchizedek with Rev. Daniel Chesbro • Sunday, June 29 • 1 to 5:00 p.m. • As an ordained priest, you will be able to perform legal weddings, baptisms, funerals/ memorials, sacred rituals, and ceremonies. Those who do healing work, energy work, body work, or intuitive readings/counseling may wish to become ordained, as a form of legitimacy and protection and as a statement of their spiritual path. $199. For more information contact Amy at (734) 358-0218, email amy@enlightenedsoulcenter.com, or visit enlightenedsoulcenter.com.

Sustainable Living Skills

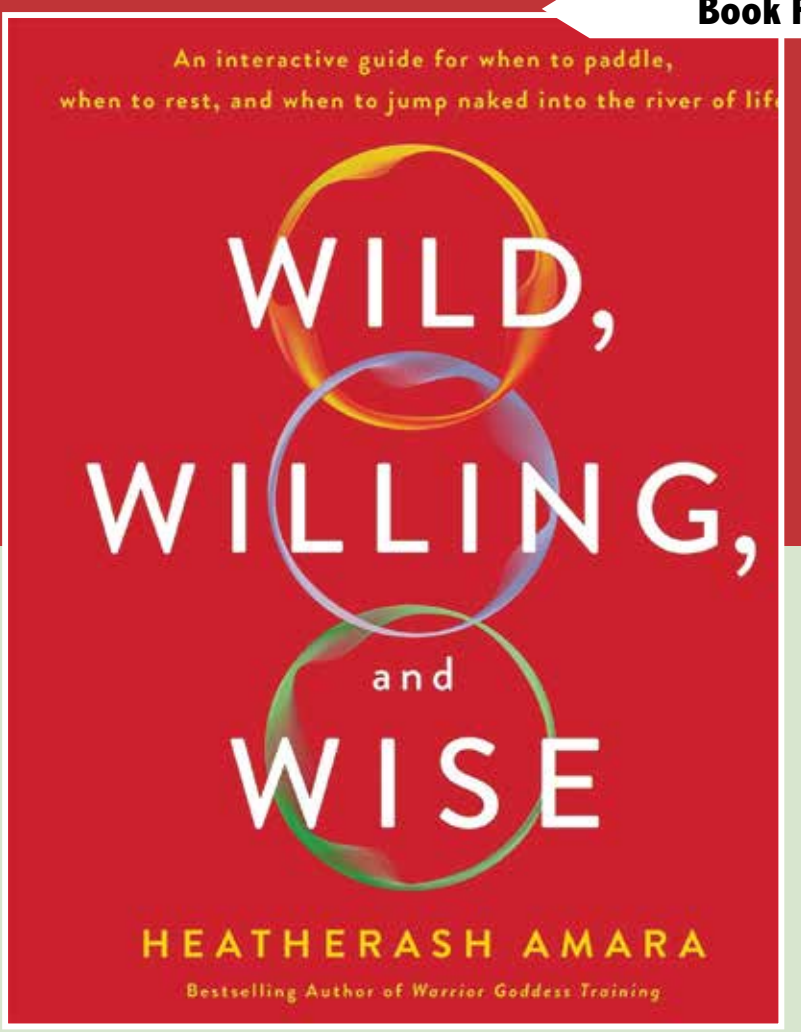
Ypsi Farmers Market with Growing Hope • May Through October • 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • Join us at the Ypsi Farmers Market! All season long, we're bringing the community together with a series of vibrant events celebrating local entrepreneurs, culture, food, and fun! From empowering young business owners to honoring heritage and connecting people with resources, there's always something special happening. Special events: May 3rd- Opening Day; May 17th - Children's Entrepreneurial Market; June 21 - Juneteenth Celebration; July 26th - Community Resource Fair; Aug 9th - Food Safety Event/ Mid-Summer event. FREE. For more information visit ypsimarkets.info.

Internship at Strawbale Studio with Deanne Bednar • Full Month in May or July • A unique opportunity to experience a variety of natural building skills while living on-site at Strawbale Studio. Classes and hands-on: foundation, round pole framing, strawbale walls, earth plaster and cob. Enrichment: thatching, foraging, pizza in the earth oven and more! Some partial-pay work trade available. $1250 or $950 paid 1 month in advance. Includes room and board. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Book Review

WILD, WILLING AND WISE:

An Interactive Guide for When to Paddle, When to Rest, and When to Jump Naked into the River of Life


An interactive guide for when to paddle,
when to rest, and when to jump naked into the river of life
WILD,
WILLING,
and
WISE
HEATHERASH AMARA
Bestselling Author of Warrior Goddess Training

By Christine MacIntyre

HeatherAsh Amara's *Wild, Willing, and Wise: An Interactive Guide for When to Paddle, When to Rest, and When to Jump Naked into the River of Life* is a profoundly introspective and empowering book that invites readers, particularly women, to embrace their wild nature, cultivate courage, and grow into wisdom. Known for her teachings in feminine empowerment, Amara has crafted a guidebook that seeks to awaken the primal, creative, and compassionate spirit within. This book blends self-help with spiritual exploration, challenging readers to step into their true power by balancing freedom, bravery, and deep knowing.

Amara emphasizes from the beginning that the book is meant for readers who want to engage with the world fully. This opens up accessibility to people from all walks of life, including those who seek to be creative, involved, and open to new experiences as well as those willing to embrace the idea of being compassionately vulnerable and authentic.

HeatherAsh Amara's Wild, Willing, and Wise: An Interactive Guide for When to Paddle, When to Rest, and When to Jump Naked into the River of Life is a profoundly introspective and empowering book that invites readers, particularly women, to embrace their wild nature, cultivate courage, and grow into wisdom.

Amara maintains a light and playful tone in her book while addressing profound topics. "Remember: life is complicated, unpredictable, and sometimes a real bitch." She emphasizes that the book is not a manual for living life in a prescribed way. Instead, she encourages readers to remain open to new possibilities and allow the energy guides to help them navigate life's challenges. These guides include wild energy, enabling readers to explore new experiences; willing energy, which provides support during difficult times; as well as wise energy which uses past experiences as momentum rather than allowing them to weigh us down.

The book is presented as a workbook, but it offers much more than that. It contains a transformational framework that helps readers access "inner freedom, powerful play, and creative action." Amara creates an atmosphere where readers feel comfortable exploring transformative possibilities using a conversational tone. The book encourages readers to follow along, embrace change, and live fully. While providing plenty of advice and helpful instructions, Amara never comes across as bossy or superior. Instead of feeling forced, readers feel guided, seamlessly blending the content with their intuition.

The book is structured around these archetypes—Wild, Willing, and Wise—each serving as a guide to self-discovery and mastery. Amara explains how to harness each energy, teaching readers to recognize when they have too much or too little. Excess wildness can lead to recklessness, while a lack of wisdom might cause dogmatic thinking, for example. She also offers activities like writing and drawing to help readers connect with and embody these energies.

Wild: This section encourages readers to reconnect with their untamed nature—the spontaneous, free-spirited, and unapologetically authentic aspects of themselves. Amara calls on readers to shed societal conditioning and reclaim their innate passions and desires. She suggests that the wild guide embodies creativity, curiosity, and adventurous energy.

Willing: Amara describes "willingness" as our stabilizing, nourishing, and generative energy. This guide embodies a nurturing quality, encouraging readers, like a caring mother, to keep going yet when necessary, slow down.

Wise: The final section, focused on wisdom, dives into the importance of intuition, discernment, and grounded decision-making. Amara encourages readers to move beyond impulsive action and integrate their experiences to cultivate a deep sense of self-trust and wisdom. The wisdom she describes is rooted in understanding and reflection, leading to a life of balance and purpose.

Amara underscores the importance of a healthy balance of wild, willing, and wise energies. "When we can bring these three energies into balance, they are the best outfitted, experienced, and fun guides you could ever ask for."

Along with reflection, she offers practical integration exercises, such as visualizations and actions to awaken or rebalance each energy. For example, readers will learn to "read and respond to the ever-changing flow" of life. Through visualization, readers bypass the I-must-logically-figure-this-out mindset—"which means you make decisions based on what you know or who you've been"—and help tune into sensing "body-based inner guidance."

Her writing blends spiritual insight with practical coaching. The book's holistic approach allows readers to explore all aspects of themselves making the journey rich and multifaceted. However, those seeking a more research-based, straightforward self-help book may find the mystical tone less appealing.

In the end, *Wild, Willing, and Wise* offers a soul-stirring, transformative journey for those ready to embrace their wildness, nurture courage, and grow in wisdom. It's a call to action—an inspiration to step into your power and live a life of balance and purpose.

Find the Transformation You Seek
When life changes, make it your opportunity to
realign body, mind, heart, and spirit.
Integrate somatic modalities with
life coaching for momentum.
Book a complimentary Discovery Call with Lisa. dellAureo.lisa@gmail.com, 734-2746737
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WELLNESS

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Learning Tour at Strawbale Studio with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, May 10 & July 13 from 10:00 a.m. to Noon OR Saturday, August 23 from 1 to 3:00 p.m. • Tour the Strawbale Studio and other enchanting natural buildings with thatched and living roofs, strawbale walls, earth plasters, and sculptures! See rocket stoves, earth oven, mushroom garden, and more. Ask lots of questions. $20. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

The Joy of Foraging with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, May 10 • 1 to 5:00 p.m. • Explore the wild spring plants at Strawbale Studio land! Meet and learn to identify some **"Rites of Passage of Time:"** If you wish, take some home (you dig). Enjoy time in nature and the joy of foraging! We'll take some of our foraged edibles and make scrambled eggs to taste. Stay on for a potluck supper and bonfire if you wish. $40. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Learning Tour & Earth Oven Pizza at Strawbale Studio with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, May 17 • 2 to 7:00 p.m. • Tour the natural buildings and projects at Strawbale Studio. See thatched and living roofs, strawbale and earth plaster structures, and rocket stoves. Ask questions! Then, learn how to fire up the Earth Oven and make your own individual pizza for supper and bonfire. Enjoy time in nature and with each other. All materials provided. $45. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Cording & Lashing Using Natural Materials with Deanne Bednar & Michigan Folk School• Saturday, May 24 • 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • You will learn how to make string and cord from various harvested natural plants, then learn several useful knots to lash together several projects of your choice using string or manilla rope. Traditional and practical skills! $110, includes materials. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Earth Oven Workshop with Deanne Bednar and Michigan Folk School • Sunday, May 25 • 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.• Learn to craft a masonry earth oven for your own backyard. Students will participate in the construction of an oven in class, learning the skills and techniques involved in order to make one for themself. This ancient technology uses all natural materials, connecting us to earth, history, fire, and food! $130, includes materials. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Rocket Stove Outdoor Cooker Workshop with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, June 14 •1 to 7:00 p.m. • Construct a very useful outdoor Rocket Stove Cooker, and enjoy the veggie soup we make on it. Also, meet the earth oven and rocket mass heater and see a demo of a solar oven and insulative cooking. The cooker is the basic combustion unit of a Rocket Stove. $50. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Forage & Craft Workshop with Deanne Bednar • Sunday, July 13 • 1 to 5:00 p.m. • Forage materials and learn several traditional skills: cording from dog bane and day lily, wreath-making or dream catcher from vines, and a sweetgrass braid from the land. We can learn from our human traditions of honoring the earth, reweaving ourselves into nature. $35. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Sustainable Skills Worktrade at Strawbale Studio with Deanne Bednar • Full Month in June or August • An enriching opportunity to live and contribute onsite at Strawbale Studio, helping with the grounds, natural buildings, and infrastructure, while also being taught sustainable living skills. Nature, purpose, contribution, learning! Includes basic room and board. 30 hours of work trade a week. No fee. Room, board and enrichment in exchange for help. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

The Joy of Spoon Carving: Workshop with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, August 16 • 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • Learn to safely and effectively use several tools to make a spreader knife and simple spoon. We will harvest the wood from the land that day. You can take home extra wood to continue your whittling. Whittling kits with a sloyd and hook knife will be available to buy ($15 - $40) so you can go home and keep carvin'! Bring your own bag lunch. $65, some scholarships available. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Eco Cooking Workshop with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, August 23 • 4 to 7:00 p.m. • See and experience a number of cooking devices at Strawbale Studio! Cook a meal on the outdoor rocket cooker. Heat some food in the solar cooker. Use the insulative cooker, see the earth oven and learn a few other "hot" cooking tips! $45. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088 or email ecoartdb@gmail.com.

Art by Karen Quinn

Tai Chi, Martial Arts, and Self Defense

Beginning Tai Chi with Master Wasentha Young • Ongoing Mondays from 10 to 11:15 a.m. AND/OR Thursdays from 6 to 7:15 p.m. • Tai Chi, often characterized as a moving mindful meditation, is a series of postures linked together in a continuous flow. It integrates the mind and body, promotes relaxation, as well increases balance and concentration. You can attend both sessions at no extra cost! $215 for the semester. For more information contact Peaceful Dragon School at 734-741-0695, email info@peacefuldragonschool.com, or visit peacefuldragonschool.com.

Chen Tai Chi Ch'uan with Joe Walters • Ongoing Mondays & Thursdays from 5 to 6:00 p.m. OR Saturday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. • Unique movement art emphasizing inner stillness and relaxation developed through disciplined whole-body integration and refined awareness. Instruction in stance training, coiling exercises, and Chen forms. FREE. For more information contact Joe at annarbortaichi@gmail.com or visit annarbortaichi.com.

Wu Style Tai Chi Chaun with Marylin Feingold • Sunday, May 4, 11, 18, & 25; June 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29; July 7 6, 13, & 20; August 3, 10, 17, 24, & 31 • 4 to 5:00 p.m. • Learn the ancient art of meditation in motion with this "soft style" martial art emphasizing relaxation and balance. Drop-in: $5 per session collected at the door. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Tarot and Divination

Tarot Reader Dr. Mari Ziolkowski • Ongoing Wednesdays • 2 to 7:00 p.m. • Highest Guided Meditative Tarot card readings, light language channeling, healing, and clearing, as well as herbal healing divinations. 10-minute, 1 Question, 2-Card Readings for $20. Otherwise, $2/minute; 30-Minute Minimum. For more information contact events@crazywisdom.net.

Tarot & Oracle Readings with Nina McDermott • Ongoing Fridays • 2 to 8:00 p.m. • Reading a combination of Tarot and/or Oracle cards, Nina uses her intuitive gift to take a deep look into a situation, relationship, or question, offering you unique perspectives for insights and positive change. Readings range from $20 to $65. For more information contact Nina at nina@seeseehealing.com, visit seeseehealing.com, or email events@crazywisdom.net.

Oracle Readings with Dr. Suzy Adra • Ongoing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturdays• 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. • You will gain insight about your most urgent or pressing dilemma or question in addition to clarity and guidance on what to do moving forward. $3 min./15 minute minimum**.** For more information contact events@crazywisdom.net.

Intuitive Readings with Marcella Fox • Ongoing Last Weekend of the Month• Noon to 3:00 p.m. • Marcella Fox has over 20 years of experience doing intuitive readings. $20 for first 15 min. $1 per min additional. For more information contact events@crazywisdom.net.

Tarot 101 with Nina McDermott • Saturday May 3; June 7; August 2 from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. OR Wednesday May 7; June 4; July 2; August 6 from 6 to 8:00 p.m. • Class will cover history and basics of Tarot and how to start doing readings. Learn the differences between Tarot and Oracle decks and experience using cards to connect to your intuition while also getting a multi perspective reading. We end with a 30-minute clinic to practice, discuss, and share knowledge with others in the community. $45. For more information contact Nina at nina@seeseehealing.com or email events@crazywisdom.net.

Community Tarot Clinic with Nina McDermott • Saturday May 3; June 7; August 2 from 2 to 2:30 p.m. OR Wednesday May 7; June 4; July 2; August 6 from 8 to 8:30 p.m. • This 30-minute Tarot clinic is immediately following the Tarot 101 class and is open to anyone. Join us in this 30-minute Tarot clinic, where you can practice reading, discuss experiences, and share knowledge with others in the community. A $5 donation is suggested for those not attending the Tarot 101 class. For more information contact Nina at nina@seeseehealing.com or email events@crazywisdom.net.

Tarot Meditation and Mysticism Drop-in Class with Nicholas O'Donnell • Wednesday, May 25 • 6 to 7:30 p.m. • Tarot Meditation and Mysticism explores the Tarot via the Socratic Method, meditation, and reading practice. Each session consists of 45 minutes of discussion/lecture, 20 minutes of meditation, and 20 minutes of reading practice. $10. For more information contact Nick at (734) 299-6472, email nicksvictorygardens@gmail.com, or visit enlightenedsoulcenter.com.

Theater

***ECLIPSED: The Sun, the Moon and Gladys Atkinson Sweet* by D.L. Patrick with Theatre NOVA • Friday, May 2 & 9 from 8 to 10:00 p.m.; Saturday, May 3 &10 from 3 to 5:00 p.m. OR 8 to 10:00 p.m.; Sunday, May 4 & May 11 from 2 to 4:00 p.m.** • 100 yrs ago, Gladys Atkinson Sweet and Dr. Ossian Sweet were charged with first-degree murder following an attack on their home. The trials were litigated by Clarence Darrow. This play imagines the perspective of Gladys Sweet. It is about what women do, and have always done, in the shadows. $30 general; $25: 65 and over; $15: students. For more information contact Sarah at (734) 635-8450, email a2theatrenova@gmail.com, or visit theatrenova.org.

Writing and Poetry

A Conversation on the Writing Life with Local Author Colby Halloran and Rachel Pastiva • Thursday, May 15 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join us for an intimate conversation between local bookseller Rachel Pastiva and local author Colby Halloran on Colby's lifelong writing journey, as they discuss life paths, memory, and what happens when you choose to write it all down. Sure to be a thought-provoking evening filled with stories from Colby's fascinating life! FREE. For more information contact Rachel at rpastiva@hotmail.com.

Plein Air Poetry with Mary Ledvina • Thursday, May 29 • 6 to 8:00 p.m. • Would you like to experience writing poetry while being in nature? Would you like to commune with other writers in the outdoors? Would you like to be inspired by nature poets and understand how to use that inspiration to expand your thoughts? Go out with me into the wild world to give some wildness to your writing. $40-$50. For more information contact Mary at (734) 646-9161, email maryledvina@gmail.com, or visit maryledvina.com.

Summer Writing Intensive at Dzanc House • Sunday, July 13 through Saturday, July 26 • Get personalized feedback on your work in a supportive, one-on-one workshop environment with professional authors, poets, and writers! And, have your manuscript reviewed by Editor-in-Chief and Publisher at Dzanc Books, Michelle Dotter. Room and board provided in our beautifully renovated space. Between $1,100-1,250. For more information contact Charlene at residency@dzanchouse.org or visit dzanchouse.org.

If you are interested in obtaining some biographical information about the teachers, lecturers, and workshop leaders whose classes, talks, and events are listed in this Calendar, please look in the section that follows the Calendar, which is called "Teachers, Lecturers, Workshop Leaders, and The Centers" and which starts on page 113.

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Yoga

Deep Centering Class Outdoors or In the Park with Ann Arbor Yoga and Meditation • Ongoing Tuesdays • 4:45 to 5:45 p.m. • This class is designed to effectively help relieve stress at a deeper level, both in body and mind. Experience a sense of harmony and centering. Dynamic posture sequences (flows) are followed by guided progressive relaxation (Yoga Nidra) and therapeutic breathing, visualization, and meditation. $130 for 5 classes; $240 for 10 classes. For more information contact Ema at EmaStefanova@cs.com or visit YogaAndMeditation.com.

Yoga Nidra & Meditation Class with Ann Arbor Yoga and Meditation • Ongoing Wednesdays • 11:00 a.m. to Noon • This class will address the whole person, cultivating a state of relaxed awareness to help one become more objective and present, resulting in decreased stress, anxiety, and depression, improved quality of life, and a higher state of well-being. $130 for 5 classes; $240 for 10 classes. For more information contact Ema at EmaStefanova@cs.com or visit YogaAndMeditation.com.

Yoga for Anxiety Course with Ann Arbor Yoga and Meditation • Ongoing Thursdays • 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. • Classical Yoga for Anxiety program will be taught. Audio and excellent text available to develop your home practice and improve your health and well-being. $130 for 5 classes; $240 for 10 classes. For more information contact Ema at EmaStefanova@cs.com or visit YogaAndMeditation.com.

Yoga Meditation Self-Care Course with Ann Arbor Yoga and Meditation • Ongoing Sundays from 11:00 a.m. to Noon OR Wednesdays from 8 to 9:00 a.m. • Each class will provide a whole body deep, yet gentle and meaningful workout, total relaxation, a great variety of breathing and meditation techniques to inform and inspire stress-less and healthful lifestyle. For more information contact Ema at EmaStefanova@cs.com or visit YogaAndMeditation.com.

Hatha Yoga with Samantha Lieberman • Thursday, May 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29; June 5, 12, 19, 26; Jul 3, 10, 17, & 31; August 7, 14, 21, & 28 • 9:15 to 10:15 a.m. • Sam Lieberman has been practicing yoga since 1988. She received teacher trainings in Yoga Fit and Yoga Medics. Yoga Medics is a medical model approach with emphasis on alignment and therapeutic needs. Drop in, $18 per session. 10% senior discount. Cash or Venmo at door. Bring your own mats. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Yoga Stretch with Samantha Lieberman • Friday, May 2, 9, 16, & 23, 30; June 6, 13, 20, & 27; July 11 & 18; Aug 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29 • 9:15 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. • Experience the how, why, and importance of stretching! Drop-in - $18 per session. 10% senior discount. Cash or Venmo at door. Bring your own mats. For more information contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org. or visit jewelheart.org.

Toddler Yoga with Courtney Fitzpatrick • Saturday, May 3; June 7; August 2 • 8 to 8:45 a.m. • We're excited to bring back Toddler Yoga to the Yoga House! Parents/guardians, dust off your yoga mat and join us with your active little cutie. We'll be playing games, trying out some yoga poses, read a yoga-related book, and have some fun! This is a wonderfully relaxed time to explore movement and to have some quality time together. $25 (or included in membership). For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

Self-Care Sunday For Women with Courtney Fitzpatrick, Penni Jones, & Lynnea Harris • Sunday, May 4; June 1; August 3 • HIIT Happy, Pulse Nutrition, and Verapose Yoga are collaborating for a super fun event, and we'd love for you to be a part of it! Includes: a 30-minute Interval Workout, 30-minute Yin (gentle!) Yoga with Guided Meditation, a 30-minute Nutrition education while you enjoy a protein shake, and time for gathering/sharing as a community at the end. $45. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

Yoga Classes with David Black • Tuesday, May 6, 13, 20, & 27; June 3, 10, 17, & 24; July 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29; August 6 • 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. • Beginning and experienced students in the classes learn traditional yoga postures (hatha yoga) with an emphasis on relaxation, concentration, and working with the breath. Cost is $60 for six sessions or $12 per drop-in class. For more information contact the Zen Temple at (734) 761-6520or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Second Annual Ann Arbor Rotary Yoga Retreat with Jody Tull, Cinda Hocking, Becky Bail, Saravanan Chockalingam & Jonathan Tyman • Saturday, May 10 • 8:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. • Learn breathing, movement, and mindfulness exercises to increase strength and flexibility. Practical sessions and lectures; Pranayama, Asanas, meditation. Learn from expert yoga teachers and medical professionals. Discover a refreshing perspective to activate your own healing environment. Six continuing education credits for physical therapists. $60. For more information visit a2rotary.org.

Yoga for Pride with Aubrey and Art Schupbach • Sunday, June 8 • 9:30 a.m. to Noon • Join us for our 5th annual Yoga for Pride event at Riverside Park in Ypsilanti, MI. This is a donation-based yoga community event that also hosts a mental health resource fair. All donations go to support Michigan nonprofits Stand with Trans and the Michigan ACLU. $25. For more information visit zionwell.com.

Healthy Aging Series with Jennifer Lenders • Saturday, June 14; July 12; August 9 • 4 to 6:00 p.m. • Join Jennifer Lenders, C-IAYT Yoga Therapist, for our monthly Healthy Aging Series. This series, focused on various subjects from learning to calm the mind, to healthy joints to a focus on the wellbeing of the heart, is designed to teach students techniques to feel good and age well. All ages welcome! $40. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

Seasonal Flow Yoga: Uniting Yoga & Ayurveda Through the Seasons with Sue Whitmarsh • Saturday, June 21 • 2 to 3:30 p.m. • Seasonal Flow Yoga is an innovative practice that aligns yoga, breath, and meditation with the energy of each season. By focusing on the season's dominant bio-energy and personal qualities, we develop self-awareness and connect with nature. Each session concludes with a chant and a seasonally appropriate snack or beverage. $30. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

ELAINE ECONOMOU is co-founder & CEO of MOVE Wellness, a Pilates and GYROTONIC studio in Ann Arbor that offers group classes and private training. Elaine and her team at MOVE also offer a comprehensive Pilates Teacher Training course plus the MOVE Well in Midlife program, a menopause exercise program for women ages 45-65. This year, Elaine and her business partner, Robin Krienke, expanded MOVE to build MOVE Upstairs, a space for mat-based Pilates, yoga, and Gyrokinesis classes plus two treatment rooms for bodywork and physical therapy. When not teaching, volunteering, or working on the business of MOVE, Economou can be found walking her dogs in the forest near her home, spending time with her three boys and husband at home, traveling, and relaxing at their favorite "up north" spot, Beaver Island.

Learn more online at movewellness.com, or contact Economou by phone at (734) 224-2560 or email office@movewellness.com.

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, WORKSHOP LEADERS & THE CENTERS

Emily Adama has been teaching mindfulness since 2014. She holds a master's in social work from the University of Michigan in Interpersonal Practice and Mental Health.

Suzy Adra, PhD, RYT is an intuitive artist, yoga and Pilates instructor, trauma release practitioner, and metaphysician. She is the founder of Bīja Healing Sanctuary in Italy.

Ann Arbor Yoga and Meditation is a YACEP, and a Holistic RYT200/RYT300 Teacher Training School.

Ann Arbor Zen Temple Priests are ordained temple priests and dharma teachers.

Becky Bail, has her RN from the U of M, is a Registered Yoga Teacher, and a certified Healing Touch Practitioner.

Amanda Bate is a certified energy healing practitioner specializing in the Emotion and Body Code, and Reiki. She helps her clients find balance using muscle testing.

Deanne Bednar has been an instructor at Strawbale Studio since 2003. She Illustrated *the Hand-Sculpted House + the Cobbers Companion* & *The Natural Plaster Book*.

David Black was trained by the Sivananda Yoga Organization, and he combines that experience with meditation training.

Carol Blotter has been teaching meditation for over 25 years and leads the Chelsea Meditation Group.

Savvy Boyd is a massage therapist for the Dominican Life Center

Rachel Briggs has been hosting the on-line Ann Arbor Death Cafe since March 2020. She is an end-of-life doula.

Sari Brown is a musician, sacred space facilitator, coach, and ordained minister (UMC), M.Div.

Buddhist Peace Camp leaders are trained dharma teachers who have led Peace Camp for many years.

Michelle Camillieri has been in the healing arts for over two decades. Her private practice provides reflexology, craniosacral therapy, somato-emotional release, sound, and energy work.

Ginger Chase has a BA in Studio Art and a background in jewelry, metalsmithing, and photography. Currently, she is an MFA candidate at EMU in 3D media.

Rev. Daniel Chesbro became a seminary-trained American Baptist Minister after college. He was guided to start the Order of Melchizedek in 1986.

Khenpo Chophel has a Ph.D in Buddhist Studies. He is interested in applying ancient wisdom to the problems facing the modern world.

Kendra Crombez is a Cranial Message Therapist working with the Weber Center in Adrian, Michigan.

Jeremiah Davies is the Parks and Recreation Director for Adrian, MI.

The Diamond Approach is a path of wisdom which combines the wisdom of the ancient traditions with the findings of modern psychology.

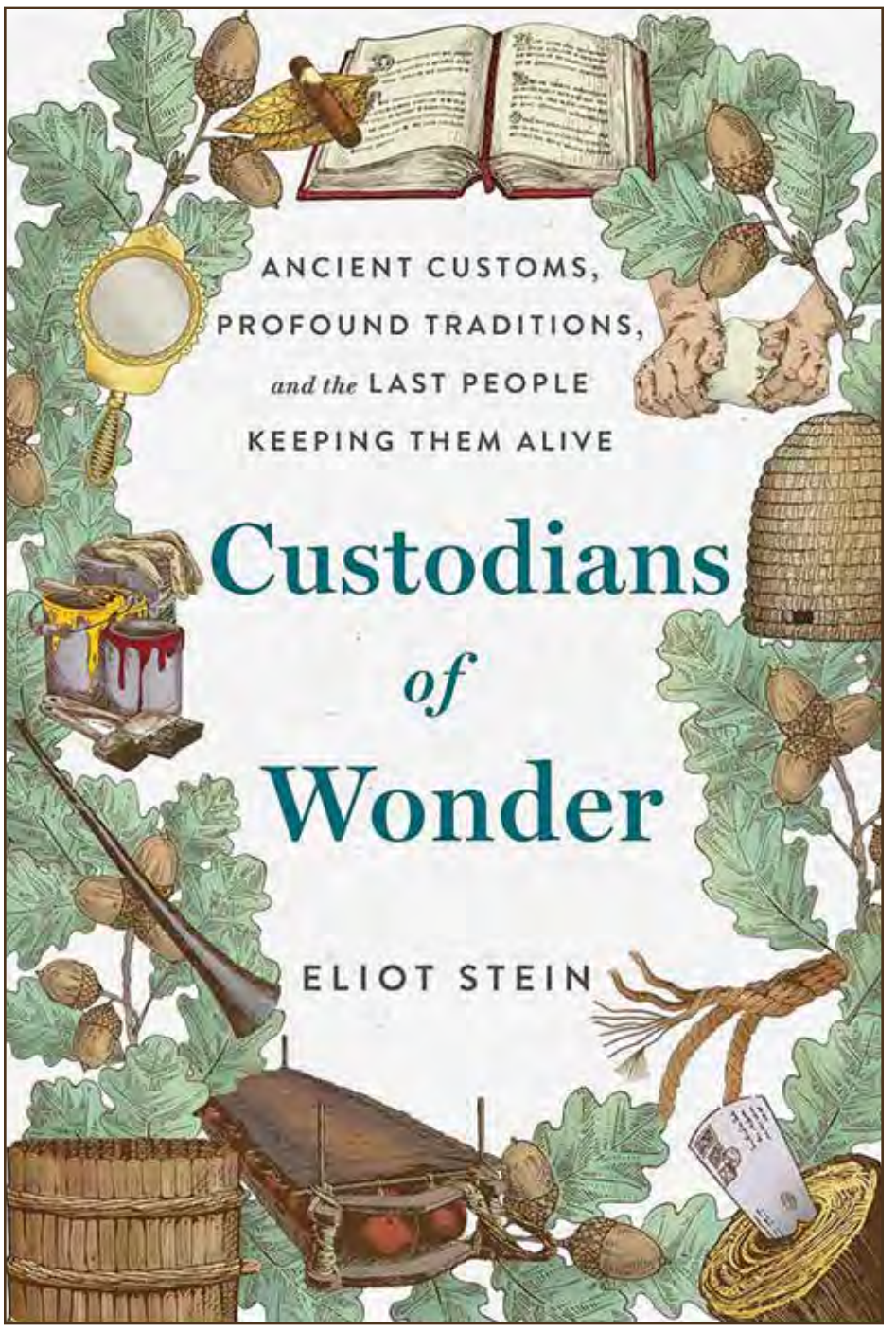
Sharon Diotte, author, has had three other successful careers: retired Registered Nurse, former teacher at Henry Ford College, and owner of a small hotel on Easter Island.

Book Review

Custodians of Wonder

Christine MacIntyre

In Custodians of Wonder, author Eliot Stein embarks on a captivating journey across five continents, introducing readers to ten remarkable individuals dedicated to preserving endangered cultural traditions. From crafting Sardinia's elusive su filindeu pasta to maintaining Sweden's ancient night watch, the BBC journalist and editor's vivid storytelling illuminates these unique practices and the passionate custodians behind them. This beautifully written and well-researched work documents fading arts and underscores their enduring significance in our rapidly changing world. Custodians of Wonder is a heartfelt tribute to the resilience of human creativity and the profound connections that bind us to our cultural heritage.



Stein captures a quiet tragedy with poignant reflection, reminding us that the world's most delicate wonders often disappear without fanfare. He writes, "Rarely is there a whisper for the last person to carry on a tradition… instead, the gentle things humans do that make the world fascinating often die a silent death." Custodians of Wonder is both an elegy and a call to attention—a testament to the artisans, rituals, and quiet gestures that shape our world, urging us to notice and honor them before they fade into memory.

The book begins with Stein's encounter with an aging woman, one of the last masters of an intricate, nearly lost lace-making art she calls "embroidering the air." Here, he sets the stage for the book's premise, celebrating innovators and risk-takers who safeguard knowledge and push boundaries.

Each chapter reveals how much of the world's heritage remains undiscovered and how easily priceless customs can fade. This collection of stories is an invitation to appreciate the invisible threads connecting past and present. It inspires readers to seek out and honor the traditions that shape our world before they disappear. Each of the ten chapters upholds Stein's sentiment, "...when one seemingly insignificant wonder fades, an irretrievable part of our humanity vanishes with it."

In *Custodians of Wonder*, author Eliot Stein embarks on a captivating journey across five continents, introducing readers to ten remarkable individuals dedicated to preserving endangered cultural traditions.

Opening the doors to the fragility and magic of tradition, chapter one takes readers to West Africa where the balafon—a sacred wooden percussion instrument—carries centuries of history. At its heart is the Sosso-Bala which is passed down exclusively through one family of Djeli, or oral historians. More than musicians, they keep collective memory preserving a culture's identity through song and story. Without them, an entire history risks being lost.

Chapters two and three explore the tension between tradition and modernity. In Sweden, one of the world's last true night watchers still patrols Ystad, upholding a medieval duty his family has safeguarded for generations. Meanwhile, high in the Andes, the last Inca bridge master oversees the annual rebuilding of the Q'eswachaka bridge woven entirely from grass. This act is not just maintenance but cultural survival.

Chapter four uncovers su filindeu, the world's rarest pasta, its making known to only four women. Though made from just three ingredients, it demands extraordinary skill, patience, and intuition. As chefs and companies try to replicate it, the tradition faces a dilemma: outside its cultural roots, it risks becoming another commodity.

Stein also explores a secret metal-alloy mirror, its lost formula known only to a few, revered as an object and a tool for introspection. He follows Asia's last film poster painter whose hand-painted billboards hold an emotional depth that digital images cannot replicate. As theaters vanish, so too does his art.

Each chapter reveals how much of the world's heritage remains undiscovered and how easily priceless customs can fade.

Other chapters highlight "telling the bees" which is an old custom where beekeepers once shared family news with their hives, believing it ensured harmony. In Cuba, cigar factory lectors once read aloud to workers, broadening their worldviews and fostering class consciousness. And in Japan, a rare fraction of soy sauce is still brewed in kioke cedar barrels, fermentation chambers that like wine casks enrich its complexity—a vanishing craft in an age of mass production. Perhaps the most romantic wonder comes in chapter ten:Die Bräutigamseiche, or Bridegroom's Oak, the centuries-old tree near Eutin, Germany serves as an unconventional matchmaking service receiving over 1,000 letters yearly. Even today, people from across the country send letters to its hollow trunk hoping fate—and a stranger—will answer.

Through each story, Custodians of Wonder reveals what is lost when ancient traditions fade and why they still matter. Stein blends narrative storytelling with investigative journalism weaving his firsthand encounters with tradition keepers alongside rich historical context and expert insights. His curiosity and passion drive the narrative making each chapter an intimate exploration of those safeguarding vanishing practices ensuring readers grasp the traditions and their profound cultural and personal significance.

"Superstitions transcend science and logic. They remind us that, for all our perceived command and control, we humans remain a vulnerable, insecure lot keen to put our faith in something other than ourselves," said Stein. Through this book, readers may realize how true that is.

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, WORKSHOP LEADERS & THE CENTERS

Michelle Dotter is the editor-in-chief and publisher at Dzanc Books.

Phoenix Duffy is a spiritual development life coach, energy healer/teacher, Akashic record transformer, breathworker, hypnotherapist, and Reiki healer.

Dzanc House is a home and a hub for regional and national arts programming for all ages.

EarthWell Retreat Center employs a team with a diverse professional background in social work, yoga, and mindfulness-based therapies, massage, and sound therapy.

Connie Eiland has been a shamanic practitioner and teacher for over for 20 years. Her numerous teachers include: Sandra Ingerman, Betsy Bergstrom, Carol Proudfoot-Edgar, and Ana Larramendi.

Enlightened Soul Center & Shop aims to spread the light to Southeast Michigan and beyond.

Marianne Fahlman, OP is an Adrian Dominican Sister and Professor of Kinesiology, Health, and Sport Studies.

Marylin Feingold Marilyn Feingold began Tai Chi Chuan at Botsford Hospital Rehabilitation Center as a way to help control pain and maintain joint and muscle mobility.

Courtney Fitzpatrick, MA, E-RYT-500, YACEP, is a Reiki Master and founder of Verapose Yoga & Meditation House. She enjoys sharing the healing potential of yoga with everyone.

Marcella Fox has over 20 years of experience doing intuitive readings. She has a MSW in Mental Health for Adults and studies shamanism and yoga.

John Friedlander is an internationally acclaimed psychic, author, and teacher with degrees from Duke and Harvard Law.

Katy Gladwin and Ariana Riegel are Lamaze-trained childbirth educators with over 20 combined years of experience working with families as they prepare for labor, birth, and postpartum.

Robin Lily Goldberg, (MFA, RYT), is an Ecological Artist, Organic Intelligence® Coach, and Healing-Centered Educator. She offers integrative co-learning opportunities to support personal transformation and environmental revitalization.

Sophie Grillet, with assistance from Larry and Lucie Nisson, Caitlin Boyce-Jensen, and Hannah VanDuinen, brings the 22nd Westside Art Hop to life this year.

Great Lakes Taiko Center and Taiko Arts Collective is a member-led arts & culture organization in Southeast Michigan, celebrating Japanese Taiko Drumming through education and performances since 2009.

Colby Halloran is an actress, playwright, and author.

Steiner Health is an anthroposophical medical non-profit 501{c}[3] organization.

Jewel Heart is dedicated to bringing the practice of Tibetan Buddhism to everyone.

Jewel Heart Instructors lead participants in a guided meditation using visualization techniques to overcome physical, mental, and emotional suffering.

Gloria Hemsher is a psychic, author, teacher, and coauthor of *Psychic Psychology*.

Amanda Marie Anastasia Hessling is a yoga Instructor, EFT Practitioner, and astrologer.

Irene's Myomassology Institute, founded by Irene Gauthier in 1987, is the oldest and largest nationally accredited massage school in the Midwest.

The Karuna Buddhist Center is an independent nonprofit with a strong background in Tibetan Buddhism and a nonsectarian emphasis.

Esther Kennedy, OP, a Dominican Sister of Adrian, Michigan, is a retreat leader and spiritual director.

The Crazy Wisdom Monthly

The voice of our community.

It's the best of Crazy Wisdom in a bite-sized read!

With NEW articles and personal essays, NEW event listings, and NEW author, artist, and musician interviews in every issue.

Visit our website to read the current and past issues of The Crazy Wisdom Monthly!

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, WORKSHOP LEADERS & THE CENTERS

Key Massage & Wellness is built on trust, expertise, professionalism, and a personal touch.

Gaia Kile is a Family Nurse Practitioner board-certified in lifestyle medicine, the branch of medicine that uses healthy eating, exercise, and stress management to prevent and reverse chronic disease.

Rob Meyer-Kukan is a licensed massage therapist, sound healer, and the owner of 7 Notes Natural Health.

Mary Ledvina B.A., M.O.T, is a healer, teacher, writer, and artist. She has taught art journaling, writing, The Artist's Way process, and more.

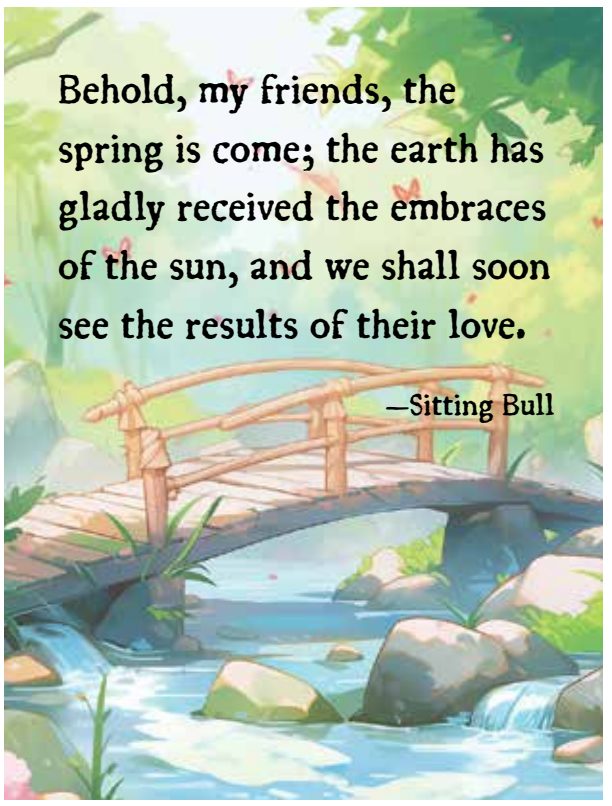
Samantha Lieberman loves the process of creating and offering safe yet challenging yoga sequencing and is deeply honored to pass the gift of yoga to others.

Mary Light is a naturopath, consultant herbalist, body worker, and CE provider (NCBTMB).

Natalie Liu is a ceramic artist in Ann Arbor. She has a BFA in General Fine Arts from Maryland Institute College of Arts.

Joseph Loizzo, MD, PhD, is a contemplative psychotherapist, clinical researcher, and business consultant who integrates ancient contemplative science and technology with neuroscience and optimal health.

Jennifer Lenders' love of yoga infuses her classes with compassionate focus, dynamic movements, and poses leading to the calm balance needed to sit in meditation.


Behold, my friends, the spring is come; the earth has gladly received the embraces of the sun, and we shall soon see the results of their love.
—Sitting Bull

Nina McDermott, Reiki Master and sound healer at AHT, is an intuitive tarot and oracle reader with a gift of offering perspectives for positive change.

Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird, MD and Dr. Quentin McMullen, MD are physicians trained in conventional medicine in the US and they received further training in anthroposophical medicine in Europe.

Rebecca Melina is a representative from Goodwill working with the Weber Center in Adrian, Michigan.

Debra Metler is a retired Clinical Social Worker and Certified Health Coach. She now helps adults express their inner playfulness for better health.

Jackie Miller is Certified Professional Breathwork Practitioner who trained with Transformative Education International in 2009 and is certified by the Global Professional Breathwork Alliance.

Nicholas O'Donnell uses a unique set of skills melding mindfulness meditation, esoteric studies, and the intuitive arts into a comprehensive system that anyone can understand and learn.

Ordained Dharma Teachers have in-depth training/experience in meditation practice.

Rachel Pastiva, bookseller for over 25 years, founder and president of the Ann Arbor Book Society, and director of the Friends of the Ann Arbor District Library.

The Peaceful Dragon School has provided the self-care practices of Tai Chi and Qigong since 1990.

Ken Pendergrass is a carver working in recycled and upcycled wood who uses traditional carpentry tools.

Joe Pusta is the owner of Lavender Lane in Milan, MI.

Stephen Ragsdale is a PhD Professor of Biological Chemistry at Michigan Medicine and is a Yoga Scientist.

SARAH KREINER,
OWNER OF THE MIX STUDIOS,

has been helping individuals transform their lives through movement since 2008. After overcoming an 11-year smoking habit, Kreiner discovered the power of fitness and has since earned recognition as Best Personal Trainer in Washtenaw County (2019, 2022, 2023, 2024). Her mission is to help others reclaim their energy and confidence through fun, effective movement.

In 2021, Sarah's husband, Gerry Kreiner, joined The Mix, bringing his business and carpentry skills to expand their offerings and help build a strong community. Together, they create a welcoming space for people to improve their health and well-being.

The Kreiners are a family of four, with two daughters (ages 8 and 9), and a shared love of fitness, cooking, and exploring new experiences.

The Mix Studios is located in Ypsilanti. Contact them by phone at (734) 845-9105, email hello@the-mix-studios.com or visit them online at https://the-mix-studios.com.

Writers Wanted

Great way to be visible in the community, and connected.

We are always looking for good articles about the holistic scene… reportage, personal journaling and essays, profiles, interviews, journalistic explorations,and other feature writing.

Modest but respectable pay. If you might be interested, please send a letter of interest and links or PDF samples of previously published writing to jennifer@crazywisdom.net.

Honoring All Spiritual Paths & Traditions

Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth

Be a light unto the world

704 Airport Blvd., Suite 1
Ann Arbor, 48108

Sunday Celebration Services
10:45-12:15

Monthly Cafe 704 Concerts,
Drum Circles, Community Sing-Alongs.

Weekly Classes and Social Events;
A Course in Miracles,
Sufi Gathering & more.

Sunday Service and many classes available via live stream

734.327.0270
interfaithspirit.org

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, WORKSHOP LEADERS & THE CENTERS

Judy Ramsey offers shamanic healing for both humans and more-than-humans as well as mentoring for practitioners. An ordained animal chaplain, she also teaches and provides animal communication.

Dianna Rhyan is a mythologist and therapist who studies the spirituality of sacred landscapes. She has a PhD in Greek and Latin and is the author of *Staff of Laurel* among other books.

Demo Rinpoche is Jewel Heart's Spiritual Advisor. He studied at Drepung Loseling Monastery under the Dalai Lama and holds the highest monastic degree of Geshe Lharampa.

Gelek Rimpoche was the Founder and Spiritual Director of Jewel Heart.

Mindy Rodriquez is a social worker working with the Weber Center in Adrian, Michigan.

Merilynne Rush, MSHP, BSN, provides comprehensive natural death care consulting. She trains EOL doulas, consults, and teaches on home funeral, green burial, and advance care planning.

Hartmut Sagolla has been studying Tibetan Buddhism for over 30 years. Since 2002, he has served as a Program Director at Jewel Heart.

Annette Schilz is a Reiki Master and Intuitive Certified Healing Practitioner in the following areas: Aura/Chakra, Sound Bowl, Tuning Fork, Crystals, Spiritual Path Consultant, and Oracle Cards.

Cindy Schmucker is the Parks & Recreation Assistant for Adrian, Michigan.

Aubrey and Art Schupack own Zion Well in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, both have been teaching yoga for 10+ years. Their studios emphasize the mental health benefits of yoga and community.

Brittany Slater enjoys creating with words, watercolor, and mixed media collage. She encourages everyone to experiment with cutting up paper and see what comes out!

Martina Smith, Co-Founder of More New Frnds and The New Mobile Wellness Spa and the Wellness + Sound Massage Experience, advocates for pain and stress relief.

Ema Stefanova is an internationally certified yoga therapist, a compassionate master teacher, and a UM Integrative Health referral practitioner. Ema specializes in yoga and meditation for anxiety.

Mackenzie Stolzenburg is a local mixed media artist based in Ypsilanti focusing mostly on collage pieces, some mixing analog, and digital.

Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe is a genuine contemplative master and a member of the last generation extensively trained in old Tibet.

Theatre NOVA aims to raise awareness of the value and excitement of new plays and playwrights.

Valerie Thomas has her B.S from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, M.S. and Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from the UofM; miRcore non-profit worker for eight years.

The Threshold Singers of Ann Arbor sing at the bedsides of people who are struggling; living or dying. We offer comfort through a cappella songs in close harmony.

Riyin Tocco is a multimedia artist who first started exploring creative expression through music then branched out to illustration, sculpture, photography, and creative writing.

Jody Tull has an MA in Music, is a Certified Yoga Teacher, and the founder of Be in Awe Yoga, Ann Arbor.

Ari Wakeman, LMSW, and yoga teacher, has worked in a variety of integrative medical and community settings, as well as retreat programming.

Rory Walsh has eight years of experience and is a certified Qigong instructor trained by Master Wasentha Young of the Peaceful Dragon School.

Matt Watroba is the producer and host of the *Folks Like Us* program, the nationally syndicated *Sing Out Radio Magazine*, and *Folk Alley*.

Lou Weir is a certified Diamond Approach teacher of 30 years and a teacher at Insight Meditation Ann Arbor.

Sue Whitmarsh, AHC/AYT500, is a Yoga Instructor and Ayurvedic Health Counselor. She has been a practitioner of both for over 15 years.

Suzy Wienckowski, Reiki Master, has been teaching Reiki for 30 years. She trained with Hawayo Takata and with Hiroshi Doi of Japan. Reiki Alliance Member.

Suzanne Willets Brooks earned her BS in dance and education. She is a CMT certified in Pilates, GYROTONIC®, GYROKINESIS®, and a is a level four Franklin Method® therapist.

Ruth Wilson is a certified McKenna hypnotherapist, also certified in coaching by American Union of NLP, with long and varied experience in training, including training in intuition.

Wasentha Young is a Master of Tai Chi and Qigong. She practices Buddhist and Taoist meditation styles and holds certificates in Acupressure and Five Element Practice.

Sharon Zayac, OP is a member of the Adrian Dominican Sisters of Springfield. Her passion is the Cosmic Creation Story and its implications for life and faith.

Mari Ziolkowski Ph.D in Women's Spirituality, also known as Sparkle Goddess, is an author, meditator, nature mystic, Goddess devotee, and student of African Traditional Religions.

Weekend Getaways

A Visit to the Maryville Retreat Center

By Petula Brown

As a transplant from the East Coast to study in Ann Arbor, most of my Oakland County experience has been in Southfield, Farmington Hills, and Troy. I never considered the extent of the county's western edge, until I noticed a "Welcome to Oakland County" sign a few minutes from US-23 heading to Holly, MI. Until then, I associated Holly with the annual Renaissance Festival, an escape to 16th century Europe that abounds with costumes, activities, and vendors. For this trip, the Holly escape is more introspective, in the form of a sanctuary called the Maryville Retreat Center.

The 45-minute trip from Ann Arbor, on mostly US-23 and paved roads, was a comfortable drive. As a center established by the Felician Sisters on over 200 acres, I expected a degree of formality, so I was pleasantly surprised that I could casually enter. Moving from the entrance and through the dining area to reach accommodations, the staff member's warmth and attentiveness complemented the positive vibes from a fellow retreatant, a repeat visitor who told me she/he planned monthly escapes to Maryville.

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Though less than an hour from Ann Arbor, the open landscape and wilderness backdrop reminded me of trips "up north." Surrounded by nature trails, Lake Elliott hosts gatherings of wild turkeys, ducks, and swans that can be observed from lakefront rooms. In warmer weather, the area provides walking trails that complement the center's laid-back vibe. The spaciousness also allows Maryville to provide outdoor team-building activities that can be customized to accommodate unique needs.

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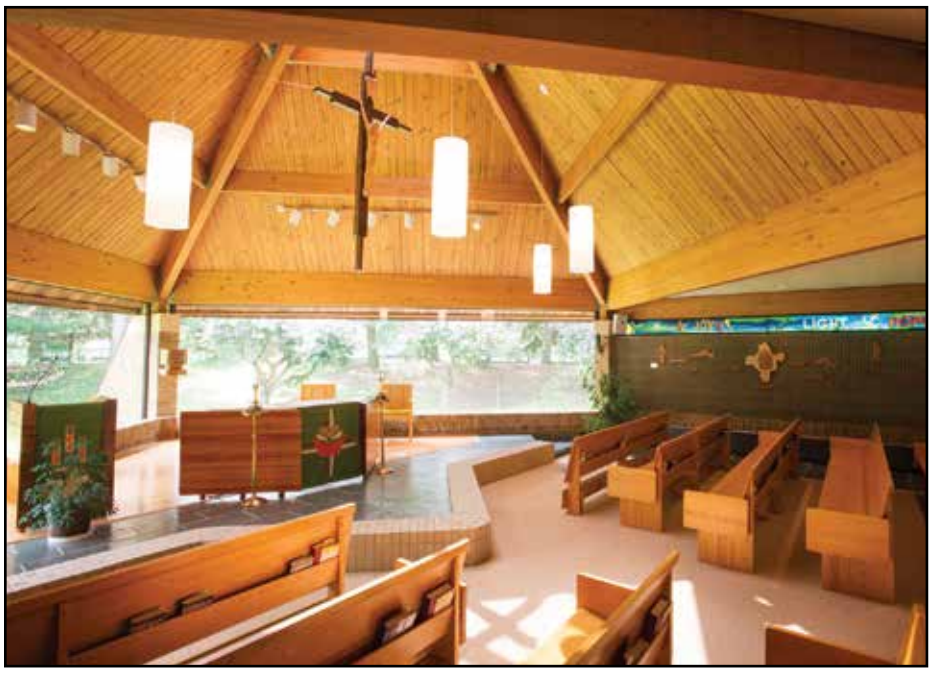
I appreciated the natural beauty surrounding the center but was also curious to learn what led the Sisters to plant roots in the area in 1945. Originating in Poland, the Felician Sisters of North America began their ministry in Detroit in 1879. By the 1930's, they moved to Livonia for larger accommodations. Blessed with donated land in what would become Holly, MI, the sisters established camp orphanages. Over the years, the site transitioned to host church camps. As camp options in the region increased, the sisters used the locale for retreats. Recognizing that persons not affiliated with their organization could benefit from experiencing the tranquility of the Center, the sisters decided to welcome the community, evolving into a place available to individuals, families, and groups looking for respite. The site was available for rental, but the sisters also offered programming to help guide spiritual journeys beyond the Catholic faith.

To support such explorations, Maryville provides lodging options that are in equal measure modest and comfortable. At first glance, the building exteriors reminded me of a slightly upscale residential campground. Besides the main Center, all facilities are single story structures. Understated and pastoral, Maryville allows natural beauty to take center stage.

My first-floor single room in the main building was easily accessible with a calming lake view. The spacious walk-in closet, temperature control console, and eco-friendly toiletry amenities illustrated an ability to balance guest preferences with global sensitivity. Lacking a phone, clock, and television, the space reinforced a focus on inner exploration over external distractions. Such minimalism also allows the center to provide financially available retreat experiences to a broad cross section of persons looking for support and guidance. Two lodges situated southeast of the main facility are particularly well suited to families. Maryville schedules fewer programs during the summer so more rental space is available for groups.



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Many programs focus on spiritual guidance which manifests in many forms at Maryville. Individuals or couples looking for seclusion beyond single rooms find hermitages an ideal option. Outfitted with microwaves, mini-fridges and casual seating, hermitages are akin to studio apartments. Families, groups, and organizations arranging events can rent meeting facilities and arrange dining services. Persons can also participate in Maryville-organized services and events. Whether participating as individuals or groups, visitors can explore walking trails, arrange lake activities, or reflect on the beach or at the fire pit.

Maryville's distinctiveness is illustrated by the ways it's described by retreatants—welcoming, a "whole"listic experience, and mobility friendly. Its spiritual leadership is guided by the belief that "every faith has elements of the truth." Center staff pride themselves for their "compassionate sensitivity to guests" as an extension of a spiritual foundation—"lay people [that] are called to holiness." That sentiment manifests in Maryville's efforts to "try not to say no" in response to guests' unique needs. With support from the Felician Sisters of North America, the Center maintains effective operations that allow spiritual leadership to focus on their priorities—supporting the community.

The sisters' commitment to caring and service is being celebrated during the 150th anniversary of their arrival to North America. Their arrival in Polonia, WI in November 1874 was the beginning of a movement that grew to several locations in the U.S. and Canada. Sesquicentennial celebrations began in Polonia November of 2024 and will continue throughout 2025 including a closing mass and reception in Livonia in November 2025. It's a milestone year where Maryville is not only honoring the past but embracing the future. Though visitors won't find televisions or phones in their rooms, the center does provide WIFI. The tone of Maryville is decidedly low tech, but administrators recognize it's an essential amenity for 21st century travel.

In addition to embracing technology and facility changes, the center is engaging persons and institutions that extend beyond their Catholic foundation.

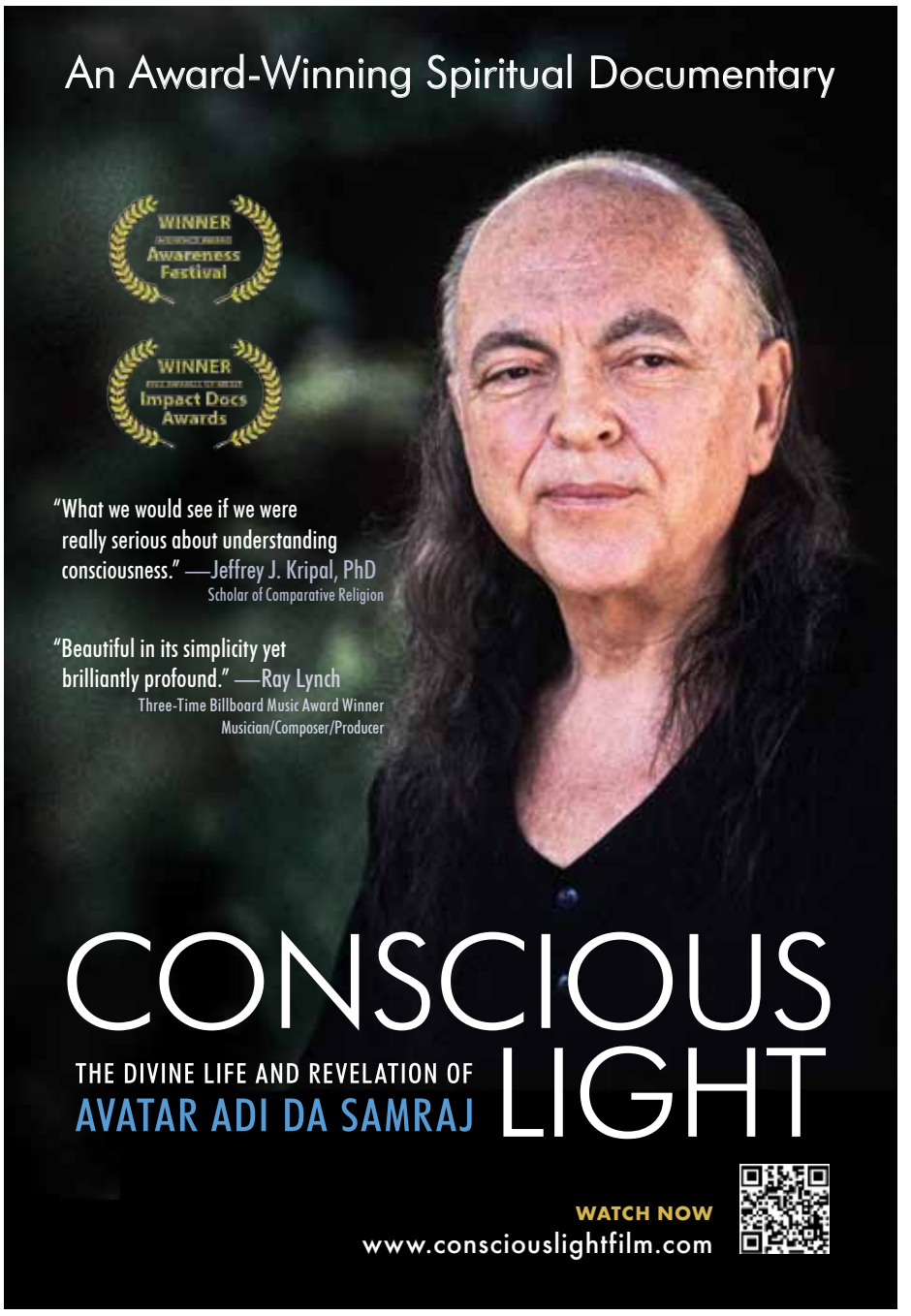
Beyond technology, Maryville is meeting a future where visitors have a dichotomy of expectations. To accommodate greater demand from solo retreatants, the center is building two additional hermitages with apartment-like conveniences such as microwaves and fridges. Based on strong interests from organizations looking for rental space, Maryville is renovating an existing structure to become an art center that can serve as a gathering space.

In addition to embracing technology and facility changes, the center is engaging persons and institutions that extend beyond their Catholic foundation. Center Director Nick Osantoski describes himself as a "partner in mission," bringing hospitality and culinary expertise that supports the sisters' objectives for Maryville. Center leadership reaches out to chambers of commerce to explore collaboration opportunities with corporate institutions.

Inspired by their spiritual conviction and dynamic energy, I was intrigued to learn the sisters' vision for Maryville in 2035. Their response spoke volumes about their philosophy. They see a future where the center is a "well known, accessed resource for spiritual renewal for all." Maryville "will be attracting folks seeking a closer relationship with God, to understand their purpose and how they fit into the world."

Maryville Retreat Center is located at 18307 Taylor Lake Rd, Holly, MI 48442. To make reservations or for more information call (248) 634-5566 or email info@MaryvilleRetreatCenter.org.

MARYVILLE
Retreat Center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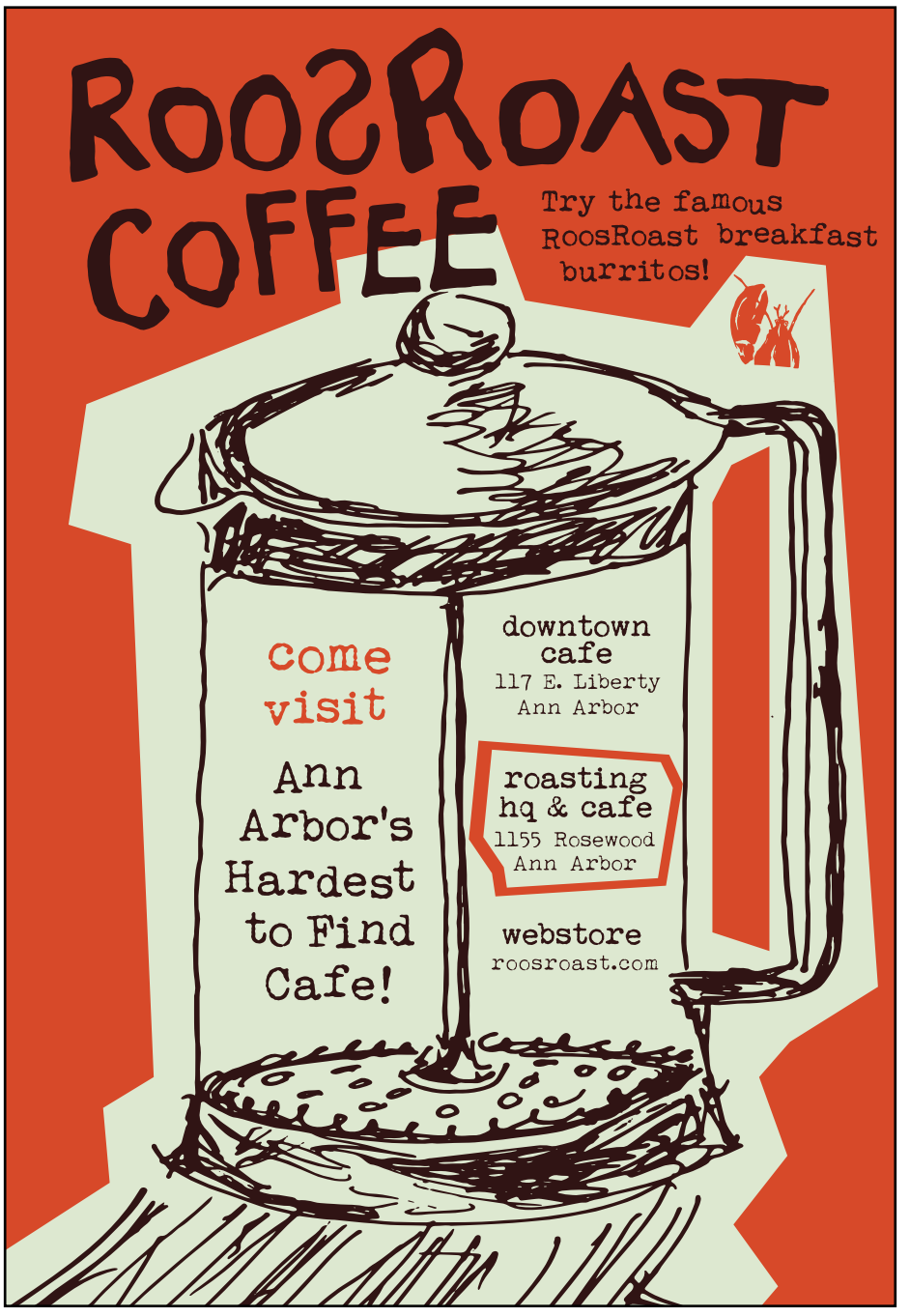

What if You Are the Plucky Comic Relief?

By Amy Lagler

I'd like to think I'm a relatively bright person. By traditional measures, this is certainly true. I have a wall full of degrees and fond memories of being a professor to prove it. And yet, I continue to surprise myself with the levels of idiocy I am capable of. I'm thinking about this right now as I can't swallow, having tried to gulp down near boiling, extra spicy kimchi soup that I overheated in the microwave. So far, I've been too embarrassed to go to the doctor on this one, but I'm pretty sure I have second degree burns on my upper palate and throat. It seems like being able to feed oneself and recognizing dangerously hot food is something we are supposed to learn early on. Didn't our parents spend a great deal of time in front of our tiny, uncomprehending faces saying "HOT! HOT! HOT" while blowing on our food? I think not sticking scalding food in your mouth may actually be Life Lesson #1. Here is hoping you mastered that. I'm apparently still trying to learn it at 58.

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In reality, there were so many things I failed to comprehend as a child that my mom spent a lot of time looking at me with a certain level of dismay. She was certain I was quite bright—an early reader with an explosive vocabulary and a watchful child who sized up situations pretty rapidly. But she was also a first-grade teacher, well acquainted with children who drifted away from reality in their decision-making processes. She feared for me. I was exactly the kind of child who would have tried to jump off a rooftop, positively certain that I would sprout wings and fly. Thankfully, I couldn't figure out how to get on our roof, but I did once try to spin the handlebars on my bike 360 degrees while riding down the street. I was certain I was going *so fast* that I would continue to make forward motion even with my front wheel momentarily facing sideways. I'll spare you the many details but will note my right eye still squeaks from where they pulled the stick out.

The handlebar incident was one of many things I tried as a child that did not work out for me… like licking a McDonald's shamrock shake off the pavement. Possibly this would have been okay had it been *my* shamrock shake but, in fact, I have no idea whose shake it was or how long it had been there. In my defense, we were not allowed to go to McDonalds, so I was a bit desperate. This wasn't a nutrition issue. We regularly ate Spam, friend baloney sandwiches, Chop Suey made strictly from canned ingredients, and some kind of weird Chef Boyardee "lasagna" made with cottage cheese. McDonalds, though, was simply too expensive in my mom's eyes. Actually, all restaurants were too expensive in her eyes, as were other things I desperately needed, like Pringles. Every week we would have the same conversation in the chip aisle at Meijer Thrifty Acres, "Chips in a *can?* I'm not buying expensive chips in a can!" I did get to eat Pringles every year for Christmas breakfast (Thanks Santa!), but McDonalds was an even rarer treat.

So, of course, all my sisters and I wanted was McDonalds and I, especially, craved a shamrock shake—the bright green sign of spring that I was sure would create an unprecedented taste sensation in my mouth. But there was no way I was going to get a shamrock shake from my mom and, since they weren't around in December, Santa was out too. So perhaps you can see why licking one off the sidewalk seemed like the best—maybe only option. Still, it was a profoundly bad idea. I'll definitely spare you the details on that one.

Then there was the time I decided to create "mood lighting" in my bedroom so I could more effectively pretend I was a movie star. When I played "movie star" I liked to use my mom's mink stole. I'm pretty sure she never actually wore it as it was hideously creepy, an animal pelt with its mouth and toenails still intact, but I thought it was the perfect way to transform myself into the epitome of Hollywood glamour. She let me borrow it as I usually just put it around my neck. She never anticipated that one day I would wrap it around an exposed lightbulb to cast myself in romantic shadows. Of course, that got boring pretty fast, so I shed my celebrity fantasies and went to play like a regular kid making pies out of berries from our boxwood bushes with my best friend across the street. I remember my dad yelling *really loud* and turning to see smoke pouring out of my bedroom window. By that point, I'd forgotten all about that poor little mink (as if being made into that stole wasn't indignity enough). Thankfully, my parents let me come home.

I'd like to say I've outgrown this type of foolishness and, to a certain degree I have. I can now buy whatever food I am craving for myself and, obviously, dimmer switches have made creating mood lighting a lot less hazardous. But I have a stack of doctor's bills that suggest I'm still capable of getting myself into situations that are both comical and dangerous. I'm sure many of you are thinking, "Oh it can't be that bad—but try explaining to your chiropractor that your head is all messed up because you got your ponytail caught up in the roller of your vacuum cleaner. How does that even happen? Or imagine telling the urgent care doctor that you broke your rib falling headfirst into your recycle tub attempting to retrieve a Menard's rebate worth $7.37.

I have a friend who is very safety conscious, and he often tries to steer me away from some of my brilliant, but ill-considered, plans. We'll call him John (as that's his name). I think he got a false sense of security around my intellect from the degrees on my wall, but it didn't take him long to figure out that many of my most elaborate ideas are not academic or degree worthy in any way. Usually, he listens to my plan with a look that vacillates between humor and alarm, and then he holds up both his hands and says, "Okay Amy, let's think this through for a minute." The ensuing conversation usually results in some alterations to the plan for one safety reason or another, and occasionally, the total abandonment of the plan on account of impracticality or actual peril. Sometimes (and these are my favorite times), John plays along and comes up with ways to make the plan ever more death defying which inevitably results in a whole lot of laughter.

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In truth, it would not be too difficult for me to reign in my internal idiot. My logical brain is quite capable of killing off everything in its path. But I don't, because that fool represents some of my favorite human qualities. She is creative, imaginative, open to new ideas, solution oriented, and confident enough to think that she's capable of actually coming up with solutions. She possesses incredible optimism and believes this is a place of infinite possibilities (even if she does sometimes forget about the frailties of a human body). Ultimately, she's also very entertaining and she makes me laugh. Often, she makes others laugh, a group that includes not only friends, but random strangers and a lot of x-ray technicians and urgent care doctors who, for sure, need more laughs. I'm pretty sure we all do. So, while I'm not suggesting everyone should embrace their inner fool, I do believe that if you are someone prone to frivolity and have the ability to laugh at yourself, you should definitely share the joy.

Amy Lagler lives in Ann Arbor where she is currently nursing a broken nose from rough-housing with John's 60-pound golden-doodle. Yes, he told her it was a bad idea (on more than one occasion). On the plus side, she had a great laugh with the doctor at the IHA on Jackson Road—and laughing with a broken nose is a lot less painful than laughing with a broken rib.

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